

Community Boards as Best Practice

“Community members bring **valuable experience and insight** about what’s needed, what works, and **how people are already navigating complex safety-net systems**. Community members also have the ability to **pull in new partners and resources**, and to **advocate for supportive policies when institutions cannot**.”

(ChangeLab Solutions, 2018, p. 40)

“Establishing and sustaining a CAB is a time- and labor-intensive process — which many new partnerships underestimate.” (Newman et al., 2011)

What is a Community Board?

A Community Board (CB) is a formalized group of community members who represent the interests of the individuals/groups involved in community-engaged research and practices. While there can be multiple purposes for a CB, depending on the interests/needs of the community-academic partnership, successful CBs are able to remain flexible enough in their formation, operation, and maintenance to adjust to the ever-changing community context.

CBs ensure intentional and authentic relationship building with the communities served by professionals in the field, rather than spur of the moment, ad hoc efforts to bring random community members together when practitioners and researchers are asked/required to include “community voices” in their projects or proposals.

CBs are common in a variety of fields (e.g., public health, government and public policy, nursing, social work, community engagement, and non-profit management) and are supported by large funding sources such as the **National Institute for Health (NIH)**, the **Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF)**, and even **Medicaid**.

Benefits of CBs

These benefits vary depending on the structure and purpose of the CB, but in general, they include:

- Sustained and trusted representation of community voices.
- Individuals able to make informed decisions for the research as a result of training through the CB.
- Professionals have immediate access to a group of knowledgeable and committed community members.
- CBs fulfill many grants’ growing expectations that community members are included in research and programming.
- CBs demonstrate an investment in community members, capacity building, and the importance of community voice in topics that impact them.
- CBs ensure a more equitable application of initiatives. In other words, rather than health for *some*, CBs help advance health for *all*.
- CBs lead to community-driven priorities and community-driven solutions for health initiatives.

Research has shown...

- CB members serve as bridge-builders between community members, practitioners, and researchers. Ease the trust building process (Ortega et al., 2018, p. 1538).
- The *added value* that CBs bring to partnerships include “building community capacity, integrating the community into research, disseminating findings back to the community, and using alternative perspectives to further research goals” (Ortega et al., 2018, p. 1538).

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- CBs are an investment of time and require thoughtful and continuous training to be successful. (ChangeLab Solutions, 2018; Newman et al., 2011; Walsh et al., 2015)
- CB members take seriously the responsibility they have to fellow community members as a result of being a member of a CB (Ortega et al., 2018, p. 1538)
- .CBs increase the likelihood of research participants understanding informed consent (Quinn, 2004; Strauss et al., 2001)
- CB collaboration on research projects improves data collection tools and community participation rates (Haynes et al., 2011; Ortega et al., 2018)
- CB members are more interested in participating in other aspects of projects as a result of their CB membership (Ortega et al., 2018).
- There have been successful, contributing CBs addressing LEAP-oriented topics, including reducing obesity in children, increasing youth physical activity, and addressing environmental health factors for unique populations.

Best practices for CBs

CBs are an investment of time, money, and human resources. Coordinating CBs without the necessary investments may harm the relationships between practitioners, researchers, and community members; at minimum being viewed as “window dressing,” but worse, being perceived as a form of power manipulation. The proposed budget for the LEAP Community Board is based on empirical research conducted about CBs. These recommendations are directly linked to research findings and are intended to contribute to building and sustaining a **thriving, equitable, and contributing CB**:

- **Compensate:** Stakeholders should be compensated for the time and expertise they dedicate. **Budget** for stakeholder compensation throughout the project. Create [a] line item for stakeholder compensation (Hoeft et al., 2014; NCTraCS, 2018).
- **Have food** always helps groups to come together.... Find ways to incorporate food as a line item in your budget. (Hoeft et al., 2014; NCTraCS, 2018)
- **Create a welcoming environment** for your meetings and **consistently express gratitude** in your communications with stakeholders. (NCTraCS, 2018)
- **Show Up:** Show up for stakeholders as you ask them to show up for you. Showing up can mean joining an advisory board for a nonprofit agency, speaking at community events when invited, and volunteering in communities in any capacity that stakeholders open to you. And **maintain your relationships with stakeholders**. Don't disappear. (Hoeft et al., 2014; NCTraCS, 2018; Walsh et al., 2015)
- **Capacity building:** Provide leadership or training opportunities for stakeholders that will enrich their personal resumes and CVs. (Lawrence & Stewart, 2016)
- **Power-sharing & equity:** Organize CBs using power-sharing structures and include equity training (ChangeLab Solutions, 2018; Gonzalez-Guarda et al., 2017; Walsh et al., 2015).

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