

Introduction

Adopting community-engaged approaches is one way researchers and technical assistance providers can become strong partners with communities seeking to improve policies, systems, and practices.¹

In a set of two briefs, we spotlight one community engagement method, community advisory boards (CABs), providing recommendations on how researchers and technical assistance providers can prepare for and sustain a CAB. The focus of this first brief is providing guidance on how a team can prepare to implement a CAB. When done well, CABs leverage the knowledge and experience of people who are impacted by social issues that we seek to change. We define a CAB as a group of community members with relevant life experience and/or whose lives have been—or will be—directly impacted by a study, initiative, program, or

focal system who may act as co-conspirators, advisors, thought partners, and champions. CABs have proven particularly effective in public health initiatives (Isler et al., 2015; Matthews et al., 2018). Research from these initiatives shows that CAB members engage in many different types of activities, including the following (Newman et al., 2011; Stewart et al., 2019):

- Identifying community priorities, needs, and interests
- Providing input on project activities and materials
- Building partnerships and trust between organizations and communities
- Promoting community support and involvement in research and technical assistance

In this brief you will learn:

Ways to prepare your team for engaging with a group of community members, including:

- Developing shared values
- Examining positionality
- Practicing power sharing

¹ Community-engaged approaches involve “the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or

similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1997, p. 9).

Previous research has shown that implementing CABs can have many benefits to projects because they leverage localized knowledge and bring together community members with a variety of skillsets and expertise (Kubicek & Robles, 2016). Some benefits include ensuring that project topics and/or research questions reflect major concerns of the community, enhancing the quality and visibility of the project (Kubicek & Robles, 2016), and ensuring that the project is culturally responsive (Cramer et al., 2018).

Participation in CABs can benefit community members as well. According to Stewart et al. (2019), the most common benefit to CAB members is the opportunity to network, followed by recognition within their organization and/or community. CAB members may gain access to opportunities for training and leadership development. Participation in CABs also may increase members' understanding of their community's needs. Overall, CABs can provide opportunities for members to grow professionally and can help them get to know their communities on a deeper level.

Through a partnership with the [National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform](#), AIR is conducting an evaluation of the [Neighborhood Opportunity and Accountability Board](#) (NOAB), an innovative

diversion program for young people ages 12–18 in Oakland, California.

(See the “About NOAB” box for more information on the program.) As part of our endeavor to create an evaluation that is culturally responsive and contextually relevant, we created a CAB made up of people with lived experiences in the justice systems in the Oakland area, to help guide our work in the community.

In two briefs on CABs, we recommend practices for establishing and facilitating an effective CAB, including responding to obstacles that can impede meaningful member engagement. These recommendations are drawn from the NOAB project team's experiences designing, convening, and leading a CAB and are supported by real-world examples. We acknowledge that our experience with a CAB is described through a researcher's perspective, and while there may be lessons that can inform CABs on technical assistance projects, that is not the context in which the NOAB CAB has developed.

This first brief offers guidance on how to prepare for a CAB. It covers developing shared values, creating positionality statements, and practicing power sharing. In the second brief, *Leading a Highly Engaged Community Advisory Board*, we provide field-tested practices for forming, operating, and maintaining a CAB.

ABOUT NOAB

The Neighborhood Opportunity and Accountability Board (NOAB) is a community-driven development model aimed at diverting young people facing offenses that typically would lead to adjudication through the juvenile justice system. Instead, the NOAB program offers an evidence-based approach to youth justice focused on restorative justice. It aims to increase youth community involvement and decision making. To support the program's effectiveness and relevance, AIR is evaluating the NOAB program.

Getting Ready for a CAB

At its best, community-engaged work is driven by relationships (Kubicek & Robles, 2016). These relationships are best cultivated on a solid foundation of self-awareness, humility, and openness. We recognize that traditional social science research has a history of being extractive and harmful. As a researcher, it is a privilege to be granted access to communities, and it requires intentionality. The NOAB evaluation team continues to invest in a set of practices aimed at ensuring that our interactions with community members are reciprocal, designed to build trust, and minimize the potential to do harm. Next, we describe the practices we used to bring a people-first orientation in our work. Although the NOAB evaluation team used these practices internally to get ready for a CAB, these are practices that teams could do *with* CAB members.

Articulate your shared values

Through intentional reflection, a project team can articulate a set of shared values and document them in an easy-to-access format. The goal of this foundational work is to make explicit *our own personal worldviews, values, and biases and examine how they might affect our work* (AIR's Culturally and

Linguistically Appropriate Standards for Projects, Research and Operations [CLAS PRO] general principle 3; Martinez et al., 2018²). This is a deeply personal and complex undertaking, as each project team member has a set of values that they live by, and each person is likely committed to upholding the organization's values. Coming to consensus on a set of shared values requires navigating these complexities with honesty, intentionality, and admittedly a level of vulnerability, as it is not yet common practice in the workplace to have regular conversations about individual and shared values. The NOAB evaluation team used structured ethical reflection (Brydon-Miller & Coughlan, 2018; Brydon-Miller et al., 2015) to articulate the project team's shared values (see the sidebar). We started this conversation through a guided reflection activity in which each person considered their individual values and then selected a set of core values that they wanted to see represented in the project. As a group, we engaged in consensus building to articulate our shared values. Many forms of consensus building can be used to develop shared values. For example, you may consider this [Values Creation Process](#) created by Gass (2013).

Creating shared values is just the first step. Remember to revisit the values throughout the life of the project. The NOAB evaluation team's values live in a shared drive where we can revisit them, when necessary, either

needs of the diverse communities that we serve. CLAS PRO also promotes effective, equitable and respectful services and products that are responsive to the diverse cultural beliefs, practices and communication needs of the communities that AIR impacts.

² AIR's CLAS PRO is a set of standards intended to provide guidance for the measurable integration of diversity, equity, and inclusion across projects, research and operations. The CLAS PRO is intended to build knowledge, skills, and dispositions of staff to address the wide-ranging

NOAB Evaluation Team Values

- Justice
- Community
- Joy
- Respect
- Power of self
- Growth

as a group or individually. We typically revisit them quarterly, when we have our “all-hands” meetings. For an example of a more structured values check-in, see [this resource](#) that offers a guided reflection on how you are practicing your values.

We also revisit the values when we have key decision points for the project, such as recruitment, instrument development, and presentations, or when we are wrestling with an unexpected issue. Often, the opportunities to revisit our values arise organically, as inevitably a team member will remind us that our values are a resource that can help guide our next steps.

Examine your positionality

Positionality is the confluence of social statuses that a person possesses within a broader political, social, and economic context and the explicit acknowledgment of the privileges, or lack thereof, afforded by the person’s social standing (Lokot, 2022). Examining positionality pushes us to *be keenly aware of our own personal worldviews, values, and biases and how they might affect our work* (CLAS PRO general principle 4; Martinez et al., 2018.) One way to begin the practice of examining your positionality is to write an individual positionality statement, a written reflection on how the multiple identities and social statuses you hold come to bear on your work (Curran & Randall, n.d.). Much of the value of a positionality statement comes from the

reflection required to craft it, although the ability to be transparent about your positionality with partners is not to be underestimated.

There are multiple ways to reflect on your positionality, each requiring open exploration of your social identities in relation to your professional activities. The NOAB evaluation team used a social identity map to reflect on our multiple identities. Two examples of social identity maps are Stanford University’s [Map Your Identities Tool](#) (n.d.) and [a three-tiered Social Identity Map](#) (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019). Then the team engaged in guided reflection about how the multiple dimensions of our identities interacted with the project. A few sample questions we used during our group reflection are:

- How do different facets of my identity impact the way I approach, interact with, and interpret my research?
- How do these facets impact the way I understand and interact with research participants? With their data?
- What assumptions am I bringing?
- Who am I doing research for and with? (Steltenpohl et al., 2023)

These activities served to clarify how we were shaping the research, individually and collectively. Teams can build off individual positionality statements by choosing to craft a team positionality statement.

If you want to learn more about positionality, we encourage you to review two articles: “Beyond making a statement: An intersectional framing of the power and possibilities of positioning” (Boveda &

Annamma, 2023) and “Race, culture, and researcher positionality: Working through dangers seen, unseen, and unforeseen” (Milner, 2007). Both articles offer frameworks for project teams to integrate positionality into their work.

The kind of critical reflection needed to craft positionality statements should be iterative. Reflect anew when you start a project and as your social identities evolve. These changes can have meaningful shifts in the way we interact with the work we do. For example, a new project brings new contexts, new people, and new research designs that can shift how you show up in the work. Likewise, a new perspective of who you are will affect how you see and interact with existing projects.

Practice power sharing

By choosing to involve a CAB in a project, you are committing to giving CAB members a voice. And you must decide how and in what ways you can incorporate the perspectives of CAB members. Exhibit 1 shows options for the extent to which you might decide to share power with a CAB.

It is best to think about which level of power sharing is feasible given the project context and constraints and to avoid thinking of these levels as static. The project may allow for more or less power sharing at times. The power-sharing options (i.e., Consult, Involve) are not inherently “good” or “bad,” so value judgments should be avoided. Each option will come with benefits and trade-offs that are shaped by the project goals and context.

Gaining clarity on the desired level of power sharing and discussing power-sharing

strategies is one way to *recognize the existence of privilege, power, and authority in professional and interpersonal interactions* (CLAS PRO general principle 6; Martinez et al., 2018) and to mitigate potentially harmful power imbalances. A strong first step toward strengthening intentional power sharing is to assess how power is distributed in the project team. Start by discussing which power-sharing option best characterizes the team. Was that intentional? Does it fit the context and goals of the project? If not, in what ways can the team shift habits to get to the desired power-sharing option? This exercise will give the team an opportunity to reflect on and discuss similar kinds of questions that will be necessary for electing which power-sharing options to pursue with the CAB.

Once the team has examined which level of power sharing is the best fit for the CAB, carefully reflect on the time and infrastructure needed for that option and ensure that project timelines, budgets, and client expectations are aligned. The CAB for the NOAB evaluation fluctuates between “Consult” and “Involve.” They advise the evaluation team on key project activities (e.g., instrument development); however, they do not make decisions with the team. We want our CAB members to know that we take their input seriously, and we follow up with them to share whether and how we incorporated their feedback. We are also mindful not to misrepresent the influence that they can have on the project. For instance, the CAB was brought in after the research project was designed, and we are conducting the project as proposed. Therefore, we do not ask the CAB to weigh in on research design.

Exhibit 1. Options for Sharing Power With Community Members



Note. Adapted with permission from International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). Spectrum of Public Participation. Copyright (2018).

Conclusion

In the spirit of growth, a core value of the NOAB Evaluation team, we offer guidance on how to lay the foundation for an engaged CAB. To get the most from the recommended practices, project teams will need to commit to engaging in deep reflection, exercising vulnerability, and exhibiting social awareness. Community-engaged research requires practice. Expect that you will not get it “right” the first time around. However, you will learn

and improve. Together, through continual practice, we will become better partners in the communities we serve.

We invite you to learn more about implementing a CAB in the second brief, *Leading a Highly Engaged Community Advisory Board*. In that accompanying brief, we recommend strategies for forming, operating, and maintaining a CAB.

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Resources

Values and Positionality

Map Your Identities: Stanford University's Social Psychological Answers to Real-world Questions (SPARQ) created this activity to spark thinking about the impact of social identities on how you think and feel.

Social Identity Map: A Reflexivity Tool for Practicing Explicit Positionality in Critical Qualitative Research: In this article, Jacobson and Mustafa introduce the Social Identity Map, a three-tiered map for researchers to practice reflexivity about the role of their social identities in their work.

Values Check-In: In It Together provides a set of prompts to encourage checking in about which values you currently embody.

Values Creation Process: The Social Transformation Project created this resource to help organizations develop a set of shared core values.

Comprehensive Toolkits on Community Advisory Boards

Resource for Integrating Community Voices into a Research Study: Community Advisory Board Toolkit: The Southern California Clinical and Translational Science Institute defines community-engaged research, reviews the purpose of CABs, and provides best practices for CAB development, facilitation, and logistics.

Tools and Resources for Project-Based Community Advisory Boards: This toolkit, created by the Urban Institute, provides a set of tips and resources to help project teams create and run CABs.

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