

Transportation Outreach Planner

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Public Outreach Strategies

Community Advisory Boards

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Recommended Target Groups

Education

College Education
High School Diploma
No High School Diploma

Language

Creole
Other
Spanish

Disability

Hearing Impaired
Other
Physically Challenged
Sight Impaired

Income

Low Income
Middle to Affluent

Vehicle Ownership

Non-vehicle Owner
Vehicle Owner

Race and Ethnicity

Race and Ethnicity

Age
Seniors
Working Age Adults
Youth

Strategy Class

- General

Strategy Types

- Civic Engagement

Description

Community advisory boards serve the public interest by providing independent, informed advice and opinion concerning major policy issues. These types of boards are generally organized around specific issues or geographic interests. They can be established by legislative action or executive decision and can be permanent or temporary. These boards differ from governing bodies in that they have little or no authority. Their primary role is to offer recommendations for action and provide guidance to policy makers. ¹

Special Uses

Community advisory boards may be used to ²:

- Engage residents and obtain varying points of views and ideas in the development of a project or policy;
- Provide advice and direction to public officials on issues, policies, and regulatory matters;
- Serve as a liaison between community and public agency on complicated or controversial projects; and
- Provide oversight and review of project and policy implementation.

When to Use

Prior to creating a community advisory board, an agency needs to have a clear concept of what the board's purpose will be and what role it will play. Community advisory boards are often used during the start of a project or initiative in order to ensure community input. When projects are encountering problems or opposition, it is useful to engage community experts and leaders in a community decision board in order to help provide solutions to the issues. Many agencies also opt to have permanent community advisory boards to provide on-going guidance and recommendations on issues and policies. In some cases, regulatory requirements mandate the creation of such boards. ³

Cost

**** Moderate (\$1000 to \$9999)**

The cost of creating and managing community advisory boards is moderate. Expenses include staff time, postage, meeting space and equipment. Since most community advisory meetings are required to be publically noticed, the most expensive item for operating such boards is advertising meetings in newspapers of general circulation. Some agencies provide meals at meetings or reimburse members for their travel since members generally do not receive compensation for their service.

Low (up to \$999)	*
Moderate (\$1,000 to \$9,999)	**
High (\$10,000 to \$50,000)	***
Very High (Above \$50,000)	****

Disclaimer: The cost estimates provided are intended to be a guide. Project costs will vary depending on the size and nature of the project.

Time

*** 1 to 3 months**

The time needed to create and maintain a board is relatively minimal. Creating a community advisory board may take several months. Once the board is created, staff will need to devote time to coordinate meetings, produce agendas and minutes, and attend the meetings.

1 to 3 months
6 months to a year
Multiyear

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* *
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Disclaimer: The time estimates are approximations. The duration of a project may vary depending on various factors, including size and budget.

Implementation Guidelines and Suggestions

The following serve as recommended guidelines and suggestions for creating and managing community advisory boards: ⁴

- **Determine the need for a community advisory board.** Agencies need to determine whether it is necessary to create a community advisory board and what role the board will play. It is also important for agencies to determine if the board should be a permanent or a temporary body.
- **Review legal requirements.** Some state and local laws may specify how boards are to be organized, who may serve on the boards, and other requirements. Agencies need to be familiar with any legal requirements regarding the formation and membership of community advisory boards.
- **Determine board composition and tenure.** The specific task or role of a board will help to determine the composition of its members. Although most community advisory boards are composed primarily of community representatives, some boards include elected or appointed officials. A board should also seek members with different experience and expertise in order to ensure balanced representation. Length of tenure may vary, depending on tasks and by-laws, but is generally one to five years.
- **Establish a formal appointment process.** All boards should have a formal process for nominating or appointing members. The by-laws should clearly specify if members are to be elected by their peers, nominated by board members, or appointed by elected officials. It should also provide a process for selecting individuals to serve in leadership positions, as well as a mechanism for disputing the selection process.
- **Solicit members in a variety of ways.** Members who serve on policy boards are drawn from many sources. They include community and business leaders, leaders from special interest groups, and interested individuals. Agencies should maintain a list of potential candidates and should seek assistance in recruitment from professional groups, community organizations and the media. The following are items that should be considered when recruiting members, continued membership, or conflicts of interest:
 - Diversity
 - Connection to community
 - Knowledge of issues and process
 - Past experience on community advisory boards
- **Provide training to everyone who serves on the community advisory board.** Agencies should provide training on the role, responsibilities, and ethical obligations of serving on a community advisory board. The training should also provide information on regulatory requirements, by-laws and board processes. Such training should be provided on a regular basis in order to foster effective boards. Along with the regular on-going training, new members should receive a comprehensive orientation.
- **Determine the level of staff support that will be provided to the board.** Staff support may include developing agendas, providing and setting up the meeting space, operating equipment for presentations, recording the proceedings, meeting facilitation, related back-up material and expert testimony. The meeting frequency and nature of the board will determine how much staff support is required. Agencies need to have sufficient staff resources to manage the community advisory boards; otherwise, board members may feel ignored or superfluous.

Recommended Target Demographics

Community advisory boards can be created for all demographic groups. In order to be truly representative of a community or target group, the members of an advisory board should include a mix of community leaders, representatives from community based organizations, as well as individuals with needed expertise. If the advisory board represents persons with disabilities or non-English-speaking populations, meetings and materials should be provided in a manner that allows such populations to participate. Boards that represent issues related to youth should seek to include parents and youth representatives.

Lessons Learned/Challenges

Below are key points to keep in mind when creating or managing a community advisory board: ⁵

- **Involve elected officials and keep them informed.** Elected officials often want to be informed of a board's progress. They should be kept informed of the board's actions and issues of concern, particularly if the board represents the area which the public officials serve.
- **Maintain communication with board members and keep a written record of meetings.** Agencies should maintain copies of minutes, agendas, handouts, and sign-in sheets for the record. Prior to scheduled meetings, members should receive copies of minutes from the last meeting, as well as information on the subjects to be covered at the upcoming meeting so that they may prepare and formulate questions and discussion points. Such records may be useful in clarifying questions related to board action or community concerns expressed at the meetings.
- **Boards should conduct a self-assessment once a year to determine what is needed to make the body more effective.** Such assessment should include a review of attendance by members, need for training, adequacy of by-laws and processes, and missing representation or expertise on the board.
- **Board members should receive training on rules pertaining to ethics and conflict of interest.** Members of community advisory boards need to have a clear understanding of the ethics rules and conflict of interest regulations that apply to them as members of board. Such training should include information on lobbying, and who members may communicate with regarding issues that may come before the board.
- **Representation from a variety of interest groups will help to ensure boards are not one-sided.** Agencies should seek to obtain participation from underrepresented interests in order to achieve balanced representation and avoid potential criticism of the board's composition.
- **Establish a clear understanding of the board's authority and the role of the agency.** Problems occur when agencies are reluctant to take direction from community advisory boards, or when boards have an unclear understanding of their role and authority. In some cases, agencies may perceive board requests to be overreaching. In such cases, it is important for agencies and boards to have a clear understanding of their respective roles and the limitations of their authority. Some agencies may address this issue by having a written policy which outlines the role and responsibilities of board members and staff, as well as the types of requests that board members may make.

Case Studies

The following are case studies of how community advisory boards were used as a public participation tool:

- The state of Maryland created a 76-member task force for the U.S. 301 corridor study to address regional transportation issues, develop and evaluate possible transportation and land-use solutions, and recommend public policies. The majority of members were private citizens (http://www.us301waldorf.org/pages/previous_studies.php).⁶
- The Albuquerque, New Mexico, MPO Urban Area Truck Route Task Group was created through a mailing to 300 neighborhood, advocacy, and business groups. The task force assisted in the development of a commercial vehicle network plan (http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp_syn_47.pdf).⁷

For Further Information

BoardSource: This website is dedicated to board development issues. It provides guides, as well as information on workshops, assessments, and training opportunities for board development (<http://www.boardsource.org>).⁸

Strategic Board Recruitment: A Key to Building a Dynamic Board? This presentation provides recommendations for board recruitment strategies (http://www.niqca.org/documents/Strategic_Board_Recruitment.pdf).⁹

Board Development: Board Models: The site provides a brief guide on effective board development (<http://www.boarddevelopment.org/en/1/models.aspx>).¹⁰

Sources

¹ Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), "USDOT FHWA/FTA Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making: Citizens on Decision and Policy Bodies ." August 2002, FHWA, 29 March 2011 < http://www.planning.dot.gov/PublicInvolvement/pi_documents/toc.asp > .

² FHWA, " Citizens on Decision and Policy Bodies ."

³ Gardella, Adriana, "How to Create an Advisory Board," 17 February 2010, The New York Times: Business Section, 29 March 2011, < <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/18/business/smallbusiness/18sbiz.html> > .

⁴ FHWA, " Citizens on Decision and Policy Bodies ."

⁵ FHWA, " Citizens on Decision and Policy Bodies ."

⁶ Maryland Department of Transportation (DOT), " Previous Studies: US 301 Transportation Study Task Force (1993-1996)," Maryland DOT, State Highway Administration, < http://www.us301waldorf.org/pages/previous_studies.php >.

⁷ Davis, Mary J., "Corporate Culture as a Driver of Transit Leadership Practices," 2003, Federal Transit Administration, 29 March 2011, < http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp_syn_47.pdf >.

⁸ BoardSource, 22 June 2011, < <http://www.boardsource.org> > .

⁹ Donor, Nida and Daurus Mirza, "Strategic Board Recruitment: A Key to Building a Dynamic Board," Experts Online: 14 December 2005, LISC, 29 March 2011, < http://www.nigca.org/documents/Strategic_Board_Recruitment.pdf >.

¹⁰ United Way, "Board Development: Board Models," 15 June 2011, < <http://hww.boarddevelopment.org/en/1/models.aspx> > .