



Community Advisory Board Guidance

An Introduction

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Introduction

Building community support for Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) is a key component to the long-term sustainability and success of the program. Experience and research has demonstrated that implementing agencies with strong, broad and high-level support from individuals and organizations in their community are stronger. These agencies have more stable funding, a solid referral network, better staff retention and ultimately, a better reputation among families in the community.¹

Additionally, a strong Community Advisory Board can literally “give time back” to the Nurse Supervisor as the members take on activities and projects that the Nurse Supervisor previously implemented in an existing agency or took on with a new implementation.

This guidance is intended to offer support through the Community Advisory Board development process. However, there is no prescribed formula for creating a successful Community Advisory Board. The actual structure and function of a Community Advisory Board should be unique to the needs of your NFP program and the community within which it resides.

What is a Community Advisory Board?

A Community Advisory Board is a group of committed individuals/organizations who share a passion for the NFP program and whose expertise can advise, support and sustain the program over time.

While there are many ways to secure and maintain the support of a community, one of the best ways to accomplish this is to build a strong Community Advisory Board or coalition. Five key reasons for building strong community partnerships are to:

- Facilitate awareness and ongoing support for NFP – for example with the Legislature, local stakeholders and community partners
- Generate and sustain a steady flow of referrals to the program
- Facilitate linkages to additional services for clients
- Gain knowledge of community services and relationships
- Support clients through identification of “in kind” donations and organization of learning activities and celebrations

Because the need for referral, client services and ongoing program support are vital to the long-term sustainability and success of the program, an NFP team, along with the supervisor’s leadership and support, will typically devote considerable energy to building these important partnerships right from the start.

¹ Larson, C., Hicks, D., Nelson, C., Olds, D.L., Johnston, E. (2008) The Influence of Collaboration on Program Outcomes: The Colorado Nurse–Family Partnership. Eval Rev OnlineFirst, 1-25, doi: 10.1177/0193841X08315131

The Community Advisory Board as a Critical Model Element

The Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) Model Elements are 18 critical elements supported by evidence of effectiveness based upon research, expert opinion, field lessons and/or theoretical rationales. When the program is implemented in accordance with the NFP Model Elements, Implementing Agencies can have a high level of confidence that results will be comparable to those measured in research.

NFP Model Element Number 17 addresses the formation of a long-term Community Advisory Board dedicated to addressing implementation and sustainability issues. Element 17 states as follows:

“Implementing Agency convenes a long-term Community Advisory Board that meets at least quarterly to provide a community support system to the NFP program and to ensure program quality of sustainability.”

In order to have a high level of confidence that outcomes will be comparable to those found in the trials, it is essential that all the Model Elements be implemented. Dr. Olds has stated, “Even when communities choose to develop programs based on models and good scientific evidence, such programs run the risk of being watered down in the process of being scaled up”.² The purpose of this guidance is to ensure that this element, which is based in the understanding that community support is necessary for program sustainability, is implemented.

This Model Element is supported by the contract between the NFP National Service Office and an Implementing Agency, which provides for an Implementing Agency to “develop a Community Advisory Board with diverse representation (for example: health, mental health, education, criminal justice, youth, business, social services, faith-based leaders, other prominent community organization leaders) to ensure broad-based community support for Agency’s implementation of the program”.

Research Supporting the Development of a Community Advisory Board for NFP

The process of building community collaboration prior to bringing NFP to a community has been shown to have a positive impact on client retention. A 2008 study by Larson, Hicks et. al., “The Influence of Collaboration on Program Outcomes: The Colorado Nurse-Family Partnership,” concluded that there was a correlation between program outcomes and the process quality of the early phases of civic collaboration development in Colorado. The researchers found a consistent relationship between process quality and outcomes related to client retention. The researchers called this link a “transfer of commitment.” This means when the community supports the program, this commitment can become operationalized.

The transfer of commitment is like a human chain that flows from the community to the Advisory Board, then to the Program Administrator, then to the Nurse Supervisor, then to the Nurse Home Visitors and most important – to the client and her family.

² Olds, D. L., Hill, P. L., O’Brien, R., Racine, D. & Mortiz, P. (2003) Taking preventive intervention to scale: The Nurse-Family Partnership. *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice*, 10, 278-290, page 220

In this study, the NFP Program Developers collaborated and built commitment in a community when developing new sites by:

- Recruiting stakeholders with experience in collaboration and a commitment to collaborating to implement an NFP program
- Regular, proactive communication with the stakeholders
- Transitioning the community stakeholders from a community coalition to a Community Advisory Board to support the NFP Implementing Agency

The commitment of the engaged, visionary group of Community Stakeholders transferred to the Administration/Nurse Supervisor as they worked with the coalition to transition to a Community Advisory Board. The Nurse Supervisor then transferred this commitment to the Nurse Home Visitors who then transfer their commitment to the NFP clients. Ultimately, the Transfer of Commitment can help clients develop a strong commitment to participating in the NFP program!

Who Serves on a Community Advisory Board?

A Community Advisory Board should reflect its own community and stakeholders; every Community Advisory Board is unique.

When identifying the individuals who will serve on a Community Advisory Board, consideration should be given to bringing together a diverse group of individuals with an understanding of the community and the needs of the target population. A broad representation of the community is critical to insure that this group truly represents the entire community. Important factors to consider when seeking Community Advisory Board members may include:

- Passion about children and families
- Experience and success working collaboratively
- Motivation
- Excellent communication skills
- Ability to influence others
- A personal philosophy that supports the NFP model

The Community Advisory Board can bring together a cross-section of business leaders, health care advocates, educators and other disparate community partners. Potential members could include:

- Major employers
- Minority advocacy groups
- Immigrant advocacy groups
- Judicial system
- Law enforcement
- Child Care
- Education
- Schools
- Referral Sources

- Health Care (influential physicians or health plan leaders)
- Home visiting programs
- Community organizers or community development experts
- Press
- Faith-based communities
- Local legislators or other elected officials (ensure that membership is bi-partisan)
- Program graduates
- Local business owners

When identifying potential members, look outside your sphere of influence to ensure that the Board is representative of the interests of the entire community. As you draw up a list of prospective members, factors to consider may include:

- Knowledge of, and access to, resources
- Time and willingness to serve
 - If the individual is already serving on 3 or more Boards in the community, look elsewhere!
- Interest in serving
- What can they do to support the Implementing Agency?

Defining Your Needs, Board Functions and Roles

By now, your agency and community will have had numerous conversations about what the expectations are of the Nurse-Family Partnership program. It is encouraged that simultaneous conversations occur that will facilitate discussion about what the expectations are of the community to ensure successful implementation of the Nurse-Family Partnership program. This discussion will raise awareness that programs need the support of community resources if they are to be successful in implementation and long-term sustainability.

The Community Advisory Board will support the implementing agency in an advisory capacity to achieve the program mission; this includes providing support in areas of identified needs. Identifying specific needs and what resources your community has to offer will help facilitate conversation around what your Community Advisory Board's purpose should be. It is important for implementing agencies, and more specifically the Nurse-Family Partnership Supervisor to have input into determining how they feel the Board should function and support the teams' efforts on the ground. For example, the agency may decide that the Board will have little or no role in the daily operations of the program, but influential in strategic planning, financial sustainability, and quality assurance.

Due to the uniqueness and the diverse contextual arrangements of each community, Nurse-Family Partnership Community Advisory Boards support programs in a variety of different ways. A CAB should include a group of committed individuals who share a passion for the Nurse-Family Partnership program and whose expertise can advise, support, and sustain the program over time. The agency will build and maintain community partnerships that support implementation and provide resources. It is essential that issues important to the implementation and sustainability of the program are brought forward and addressed as needed. While these standards will help provide a

foundation to which your Community Advisory Board structure will be built, defining what is necessary for success given your local context is crucial.

Defining your Boards' purpose should be thoughtful and deliberate for it will be the driving force behind many more important decisions. A Board that consistently drives to fulfill its intended purpose will keep Board members engaged, increasing its probability for being successful and likelihood of meeting the evolving needs of the program. The Board and its members should serve specific functions and roles that are intentional in meeting the overall purpose identified. Types of functions include, but are not limited to:

- Acting as a creative sounding board
- Providing moral support for decision-making
- Acting as a conduit for community input and information-sharing
- Advocacy
- Identifying and obtaining funding and material resources
- Generating unidentified referral sources
- Generating and driving in-kind resources from the community
- Serving as community ambassadors

These functions are examples of specific actions that create individual roles for each Board member. These roles translate to obligations and responsibilities expected of an appointed member of the Board. Roles are extremely important; they help maintain the level of engagement of the members and drive the development of future efforts and needs. Fulfilling responsibilities will often help to re-evaluate the needs of the program and lead to identifying new functions and roles for members.

Types of Boards

Once a decision has been made by the Implementing Agency with respect to what the Community Advisory Board's purpose will be, the agency will need to decide through what avenue the identified needs will be best met. Whatever option is selected or may already exist (i.e. an already established Community Board), it is important to ensure that the necessary required components are in place. These components include, but are not limited to: a committed chair; action driven agendas, member diversity; engagement and support of the NFP Nurse Supervisor; and an understanding by the group of the types of resources and support available to them through the National Service Office.

Specifically, the Nurse-Family Partnership National Service Office is aware of three types of Boards that have assisted NFP programs across the country in achieving successful implementation. Those Boards include:

- Nurse-Family Partnership Specific Board
- Multi-Functioning Board
- State Advisory Leadership Board

Nurse-Family Partnership Specific Boards

Nurse-Family Partnership Specific Boards have a detailed mission, which is to provide direct support to Nurse-Family Partnership Programs. These types of Boards may assist in a variety of responsibilities that include, but are not limited to the assessment of measures, which include realistic benchmarks, provide feedback and assist in quality improvement processes, and serve as support to the supervisor/administrator in dealing with responsibilities they may not have experience (e.g. develop sustainability plans, writing grants, etc.). While many organizations feel that this type of Board is the most effective in reaching goals and meeting needs, they can often take more time up front to develop and provide less opportunity to network with larger community groups.

Multi-Functioning Community Advisory Boards

Many NFP Implementing Agencies across the country receive support and guidance from Multi-Functioning Community Advisory Boards. These Boards tend to have broad missions that support a single or multiple priorities within a community and generally provide guidance to multiple programs.

Examples of Multi-Functioning Community Advisory Boards include The Children's Leadership Council. This Board is focused on multiple issues that impact their target population – Children. NFP is one of the programs that is supported and guided by the Council. The Board is made up of “heavy hitters” who are extremely invested in the success of the supported programs.

Many times Multi-Functioning Boards are the structure “of choice” in rural communities. They function well because all of the relevant community providers can be at the table at the same time. Other examples of Multi-Functioning Boards are those that advise a single public entity, like a County Health Department, that has more than one in-home visitation program in its array of services. These Boards provide opportunities for problem solving across comparable programs.

Some of the challenges of Multi-Functioning Boards include:

- Time not fully dedicated to Nurse-Family Partnership
- Competing program priorities
- Board Members may not achieve the level of expertise to provide quality guidance – particularly when there are several complex programs
- Members may not be able to advocate for one program over another

The inability to advocate is the biggest challenge to Multi-Functioning Boards. If this is the CAB structure that currently exists or is being developed for your community, pay special attention to how and who you will need to rely on in your community for organized advocacy efforts.

Nurse-Family Partnership Statewide Leadership Board

A Statewide Leadership Board can provide you with a powerful advocacy voice useful at both the state and federal levels of government and can provide you with an opportunity to engage a significant percentage of private or business sector representatives.

The Statewide Board is particularly useful if your State has only Multi-Functioning Boards that are restricted from advocacy due to multiple program priorities. The Statewide Board can also provide the critical advocacy needed if public funding is in danger of being reduced or eliminated.

Statewide Boards also help unite Implementing Agencies across the state by providing a single source of advocacy that delivers a message on behalf of all NFP Implementing Agencies, large and small, urban and rural, health care organizations or non-profits.

Forming a Statewide Leadership Board

There are several ways to form a Statewide Leadership Board. If your state already has active Community Advisory Boards, consider having each CAB nominate one or two individuals to serve on the Board. If there are not existing CAB's, consult with your state agency partner(s) to see if they have recommendations for membership. It is important to have all geographic areas that host a NFP program represented.

Once you have determined the manner of nomination or selection, you need to determine how you will "reach out" to these potential members. It is important to have written materials that will provide an overview of the following: 1) Nurse-Family Partnership – history and current status, 2) The State Nurse-Family Partnership initiative, 3) the anticipated roles of Board Members and (if possible) 4) a calendar of four quarterly meeting dates.

You may want to interview potential candidates or ask them to complete a short survey. Potential candidates may or may not already know about Nurse-Family Partnership. If they are not familiar with NFP, you will want to schedule a NFP 101 Session with them. The most important thing to consider is what they bring to the table. Does the potential member:

- Have access to key local state and federal elected officials
- Have connections to potential in-kind or funding sources
- Have recognition as a business or government leader in the community
- Have a reputation as someone who "can get things done"

Statewide Leadership Boards may also include members who are former clients. The recruitment and interview process may be different for former clients as they bring a different and much-needed perspective to the Board. Examples of invitation letters, Board member roles and responsibilities and interview questions are included as attachments to this Guidance.

Primary Functions of a Statewide Leadership Board

Statewide Leadership Boards primarily serve an advocacy function. The membership will have access to local, state and federal elected officials who make funding decisions regarding Nurse-Family Partnership. They will act individually and collectively in both proactive and sometimes reactive ways to communicate the impact that Nurse-Family Partnership has on their community.

The efforts of the Statewide Leadership Board are in partnership and unison with the local Community Advisory Boards. They also will meet quarterly and via conference call. It is important

to schedule at least one meeting face-to-face and that should coincide with legislative visits and/or a Day at the Capitol.

Examples of how to set up a Day at the Capitol and an Advocacy Guide that has been developed for a specific state are included as attachments to this Guidance.

Staffing a Statewide Leadership Board

A crucial factor to the success of a Statewide Leadership Board is how it is staffed. The level of staff support will diminish over time, but the reality is that the early implementation will take significant time. A moderate estimate of the time is 5 hours a week for the first quarter and then at least ten hours monthly during the legislative session. There may be a “down time” following the session, but Board maintenance will still require at least 5 hours a month.

The level of support will be state specific, but will generally require early support from the Program Developer to form and convene and create forward movement. The Program Developer will transition their ongoing participation in the role of a coach or consultant. It would be beneficial to develop a plan that takes the Board to semi-autonomy within a specified period of time.

Lifespan of a Statewide Board

Most Boards will be established for an indefinite periods of time since advocacy is always needed. What is important to consider regarding the lifespan of the Board is keeping the members engaged by identifying activities that they define as worthwhile and consistently keeping the membership fresh by expanding to include more members or create term limits to bring in a fresh perspective. This is an uncharted area and we will continue to develop guidance relative to what supports a Statewide Leadership Board over time.

Stages of Board Development

Stage I - Identifying, Educating and Engaging – Goals and Objectives

The first step to establishing the Statewide Board is to identify how members are selected. They can represent an individual Implementing Agency, a defined geographic area or have a statewide presence. The process of identifying prospective members, making the “ask” and having them agree to serve can take several months. Once at least 80% of the anticipated number of Board members has accepted the invitation to serve, it is time to conduct a conference call or webinar to provide information in addition to written guidance for their participation. These calls or webinars can be conducted by Program Developers or by the state lobbyist hired by the NFP NSO. The purpose is to educate the Board members about the funding request or any statutory issues that are relevant to the program as well as provide an introduction to the VOCUS advocacy website.

Another purpose of the conference call or webinar is to clearly lay out the Goals and Objectives for that legislative session. That ensures that everyone is “on the same page” and has a clear understanding of what is being requested of them.

Stage II – Growing the Relationship and clearly defining Roles and Responsibilities

Depending on the legislative climate, you may communicate with the Board weekly, monthly or as needed. It is extremely important to recognize each and every member's contributions on a regular basis. If possible, try to have at least one of your quarterly meetings in person and bring in breakfast or lunch to thank the members for their dedication and participation. You will find over time that some members are more willing to make phone calls on behalf of the NFP, some prefer to advocate in person and some will want to be part of a group advocacy effort.

There is no one standard for defining Roles and Responsibilities, they need to be customized to your unique situation.

Stage III – Implementing the Advocacy Agenda

There are many ways to implement the Advocacy Agenda. One of the most visible is a "Day at the Capitol". This may be a NFP-only event with Board Members, Program Administrators, Nurse Supervisors, Nurse Home Visitors, clients and graduates. Or, if you are in one of the "big tent" states – it could be part of an overall Children's Advocacy Day. As we all know, on any given day during the session, there are many events asking for legislative attention so the Board needs to determine what gives NFP the greatest visibility.

The NFP VOCUS website is an invaluable tool to getting the message to legislators in a timely fashion. Board members and program staff who can advocate enjoy the ease with which it is employed and the relatively little time it takes for them to customize their message. We know that many legislators count the number of e-mails sent on behalf of a particular subject, so volume is always good.

Still another way to implement the Advocacy Agenda is through letters to the editor. Even though many news outlets have discontinued the newspaper for an online version – there is still plenty of power in the press. The NFP NSO Marketing and Communications team can help with drafting a letter to the editor to be sent by one or more Board Members.

Stage IV – Reexamination of Goals and Objectives, Board Expansion

After a year to eighteen months of a Statewide Board's existence, you may ask the Board to step back and examine where they have been and where they want to go. Does the leadership remain the same? Are all geographic regions of the state represented? Are there Board Members who are not active participants?

These are all questions that any Board will review at a significant point in their history. The important thing is to continue to engage members with relevant activities that support the ongoing growth and development of NFP in your state.

Finally, think of how you may move the Board to be self-sustaining. This may not be possible in all situations and some will need more support than others. If your Board arrives at a point when little or no support and guidance is needed from the Program Developer or NSO staff – you have accomplished a lot!

Other Benefits of a Statewide Board

There are many other benefits to forming a Statewide Board. These include:

- Tapping into other resources including marketing and public relations to benefit the NFP program.
- Acting as a forum for creative leadership solutions to unanticipated challenges.
- Encouraging other community agencies to adopt evidence-based programs.
- Positioning NFP at the forefront of policy and funding discussions.

If you are faced with funding challenges in your state, it is well worth the time and effort to identify, form and support a Statewide Leadership Board.

Challenges with All Boards

The decision to have an informal or formal Board structure will be a discussion between the NFP Program Developer, Nurse Consultant and Board leadership. In some states, the local Community Advisory Boards have a defined appointment process, bylaws and term limits. Others are not quite so formal. One state's Statewide Leadership Board has a set number of meetings per year, Co-chairs that were elected by acclamation and membership selected by the Implementing Agencies.

The most critical component for a Statewide Advisory Board is a written explanation of Board Member Roles and Responsibilities. This is necessary for recruitment and ongoing participation. It may evolve over time, but potential members need to know up front the time commitment and action required.

Other challenges may occur when a Board transitions from one format to another as in a NFP only Board transitioning to a Multi-Functioning Board.

Time – a Precious Resource

Successful Community Advisory Boards truly live the “Transfer of Commitment” referred to earlier in this Guidance. Their knowledge of community services and relationships with providers to benefit clients as well as their financial savvy and advocacy expertise make them a true asset for the Nurse Supervisor, Nurse Home Visitors and NFP clients and their families.

The gift of time given from the CAB raises awareness and tells the NFP story to the Legislature and the general public. Board members make the difference when funding is challenged and provide strong support to our most vulnerable families.

A well organized and committed group is the ideal body to shore up efforts to find funding. Reaching a consensus, building broad support for NFP, tackling some of the tough issues of turf and philosophy – these are very important early and ongoing activities. Implementing an evidenced based program is not easy. An informed, committed Community Advisory Board makes a tremendous difference.