

## The Role of CAB Support Staff

Consumer Advisory Boards (CABs) are meant to be consumer-led, but health centers often will identify a staff person to provide non-clinical support assisting consumers in developing and implementing their own advisory board and projects. CAB support staff often balance two roles: administrative/logistics support, including acting as a liaison between the organization and the CAB; and supporting the leadership development and growth of CAB members and the CAB itself.

### Administrative Roles, including acting as an organizational liaison

- Help develop the agenda with chair/members
- Coordinate meeting logistics (space reservations, food, expenditures, reminder calls, set up for presentations as requested by the CAB or requested by staff and approved by the CAB)
- Record the meeting minutes, and provide them to the CAB and the Board of Directors
- Provide information on health center services or processes to the CAB members as needed
- Report questions or feedback to appropriate staff and report back to the CAB about the outcome
- Support CAB projects including surveys, voter registration, or health fair engagement
- Help the agency understand the role of the CAB in order to effectively work with the CAB in mutually beneficial ways

### Supporting Leadership Development

- Assist the group and individual members in defining the goals of the work and their personal engagement
- Cultivate ways for the group and members to develop the knowledge, skills, and opportunities to meet those goals including identifying relevant trainings such as trauma-informed approaches, de-escalation, or conflict resolution
- Acknowledge cultural and belief differences, allow space for people to share their opinions and thoughts in respectful ways that are personal to them but do not speak for others in the group
- Provide space for CAB members to set the agenda, facilitate the meetings, set ground rules for meetings and communication, develop their own projects, and resolve conflicts amongst themselves; step in only when necessary
- Ensure that everyone is heard during the meeting and help frame the big picture
- Be aware of group dynamics, and work to address disagreements, grievances, and other issues as they arise
- CAB support staff must also be very intentional about how they use their voice and power in order to create the space to ensure consumers are able to lead the work.

## CAB Staff Time and Role Example

- **Startup phase roles** (this phase can take around 10 to 15 of staff time per month)
  - Attend planning meetings with key staff to cultivate plan for CAB development and organizational support
  - Share plan with all health center staff, include information about the provider role in recruitment
  - Help create recruitment materials like flyers and post them around the health center
  - Assist with personal outreach to clients including lobby in-reach or one-on-one meetings
  - Communicate with potential CAB members about the role of a CAB member, CAB information, and their fit
  - Compile initial contact list and roster of CAB members
  - Record the bylaws, ground rules, and other foundational documents based on the CAB's decisions
- **Maintenance phase once CAB is formed and meeting regularly** (this phase can take around 5 to 10 hours per month)
  - Attend and take minutes at monthly meetings (email/mail minutes after the meeting)
  - Send meeting agendas and other documents before the meeting to all members
  - Make reminder calls to members before the meeting
  - Order food and set up the room
  - Support member engagement, including one-on-one meetings

## Important Considerations for CAB Support Staff

**CAB meetings can take time, effort, and creativity in achieving tasks, ensuring equitable participation, and maintaining trauma-informed environments.** It is important to prioritize process over task achievement when possible. Creating open and accessible environments requires patience and additional time, but allows for a broader range of input and helps to ensure fuller and more honest participation. Flexibility may be required to accommodate consumers' differing styles of expression and decision-making. Since many consumers struggle with trauma, mental illness, and substance use, staff must consider how to ensure that all consumer-led spaces are safe for everyone, and everyone is able to contribute in a respectful and meaningful manner. CAB support staff must support these principles.

**CAB support staff needs to ensure the CAB is a safe space where people can express themselves honestly.** There is a distinction, sometimes a gray area, between frank and open dialogue between CAB members, which can be uncomfortable, but leads to better decisions and relationships; and behavior that disrespects other CAB members, and needs to be mediated. With the range of personalities, challenges, and life experiences of CAB members, staff should allow for the different ways people express their opinions, while defusing negative interactions when they happen.

**CAB members may struggle with their role within the organization and in their relationships with staff.** It is important to set boundaries, have honest conversations about responsibilities and expectations, and to establish appropriate ways for CAB members to address concerns about staff or the organization. Concerns about their care should be handled by their providers or according to the organizational procedure, not by CAB staff. Conflicts between the CAB, CAB support Staff, or the organization should be handled in partnership by the CAB and administrators as possible. Staff must also work with the organization to create the space and structure needed for consumer leadership. There must be broad organizational buy-in for consumer engagement and leadership to be effective.

### Do's for CAB Support Staff

- Keep an open mind about CAB members' different communication styles/places they're coming from
- Be fair and accountable to the group and the guidelines
- Work to understand group dynamics and share that insight with the group
- Promote diversity and diverse opinions
- Practice coaching and facilitate peer mentoring within the group
- Address any issues that threaten trust within the group or the organization
- Maintain the confidentiality of information shared within a CAB meeting
- Support the personal growth and development of CAB members
- Remember that a formal meeting style may be intimidating or uncomfortable to some CAB members
- Feed them. Food provides a sense of welcoming and coming together important for a CAB
- Ensure that meeting times and places are accessible and convenient for the population and members
- Determine how you are able to support members who are struggling with housing or health care concerns
- Understand the chair and CAB's expectations of you, and how they want you to support them
- Remember that as a staff person, you have power and are representing your organization to the CAB members
- Appreciate that you have the privilege of being at the table and supporting the power of a consumer group

### Don'ts for CAB Support Staff

- This is a consumer-led meeting. Don't take over the meeting unless requested or necessary. Ask the chair how they would like to be supported, and if necessary, help the chair redirect the group.
- Don't make assumptions about CAB members' backgrounds/ability to participate. They will surprise you with what they know and what they have experienced, and the honesty and energy they bring to the group.
- Don't assume that your preferred communication style will work for all the CAB members. Ask them how they prefer to be communicated with and respect that.
- Don't overload the meeting agendas. Allow for adequate discussion and questions on agenda items.