



Developing and Leading a Prosecutor's Community Advisory Board



PCE



QUICK GUIDE

On March 10, 2022, PCE hosted a PCE Pop Up on Community Advisory Boards. Presenting on their Community Advisory Boards were: Prosecuting Attorney Jean Peters Baker, Jackson County, Missouri; Commonwealth Attorney Bryan Porter, Alexandria, Virginia and District Attorney Troy Rawlings, Davis County, Utah. [See their presentations.](#) This outline is based on their input and experience.

Preparing for a Community Advisory Board

Some considerations for starting a Community Advisory Board include:

Research Laws and Regulations

- Determine whether there are legal obligations regarding how to form a Community Advisory Board.



- Research whether the meetings, presentations, recordings or notes will be subject to public access, freedom of information or sunshine laws.

Establish the Purpose of the Community Advisory Board

- **Issues:** What issues should be discussed with the board? Issues have ranged from laws pending before the legislature, to prosecutor charging policies, to conviction review.
- **Internal Advice:** Convene a working group of prosecutor office employees from diverse backgrounds and job assignments to discuss the possible use of a Community Advisory Board for external communication and internal policy making.
- **Number of Boards:** Determine if more than one board is necessary, especially if there are multiple issues to discuss.
 - If soliciting youth input is a priority, consider that young people may be less inhibited in a group of peers that are close in age.

Create Guidelines for the Composition of the Group

- **Membership Criteria:** Determine whether the group should be limited to those over 18, or those who live or work within certain jurisdictions.
- **Number of Members:** Though having more voices can improve discussion, a group that is too large can make it difficult to give everyone an opportunity to be heard. Some jurisdictions have had success with groups of 10 or 15. Consideration can also be given to the fact that not every member will attend every meeting.
- **Length of Service:** Limits on periods of service can allow for new voices to join at regular intervals. Some have asked members to volunteer for one- or two-year terms.
- **Variety of Membership:** Consider the need for a variety of points of view, affinity groups and neighborhoods.
 - This may include considerations of race, ethnicity, national origin, age, faith, employment/experience, socio economic status, people impacted by mental or physical challenges, sexual orientation, gender identity and prior experience with the criminal justice system.
 - Consider intentional inclusion of individuals who are both supportive of the office and critical of past or present practices.



- **Standard Process for Selection:** A process for selecting members should be developed. For example, the prosecutor can seek volunteers or specifically invite selected members.
 - **Selected Members:** Invitations can be sent to selected members with information about the purpose of the group and the nature of the commitment.
 - **Volunteers Members:** To solicit volunteers, the Board can be publicized through the office website, social media, press releases, press interviews and community forums. Existing resources can be utilized for outreach such as community prosecutors, victim advocates, lived experience outreach workers, social service providers and other stakeholders impacted by the issues for the Board.

Guidelines for the Board

- **Develop Written Guidelines:** Develop materials that outline the purpose of the group, the expected time commitments, and expectations for participation. Willingness and desire to share different perspectives should be emphasized.
- **Background Checks and Confidentiality:** Determine if confidential information will be discussed and if background checks of members should be conducted. Note: including people who have been formerly incarcerated can be very impactful for an Advisory Board.

Conducting Meetings

Once a Community Advisory Board is formed, thought should be given to how the meetings will be conducted. Considerations include:

Leading the Group

- **In-House Group Leader:** Determine who should lead the group (this is often the chief prosecutor) and ensure that the person has the necessary knowledge to address the group in an inclusive way and to provide accommodations (such as translation), where necessary. Some suggestions for appropriate language to use with various groups are provided by the American Psychological Association. [Read.](#)
- **Professional Facilitator:** Consideration can be given to hiring a professional facilitator who can ensure that the discussions stay on topic and boundaries are respected during robust discussions of sensitive topics.



- **In-Person/Remote Meetings:** Meetings can be in person, remote or hybrid. Allowing for remote access may increase participation, though occasional in-person meetings are always beneficial. Serving food is always an advantage.

First Meeting

- **Setting the Stage:** Prepare a presentation that introduces the members and explains the purpose of the group.
 - The first meeting can be used to describe the role of the prosecutor.
 - Create an understanding and agreement for “confidential sessions” where warranted.
 - Establish ground rules and expectations for discussion. It is usually helpful to include the group in setting the ground rules so that everyone has input and feels that the process is fair and transparent.
 - Set clear beginning and ending times for the meeting.
- **Participation by All:** Be aware that some members of the group by status, age or experience may dominate conversations. A strategy for including all members can be developed. This may be as simple as rotating comments around a circle or calling on people who have not spoken.

Subsequent Meetings

- **Presenters:** Consider diversifying presenters on a variety of topics if the purpose of the Board is largely for educational outreach, rather than policy input.
- **Policy Advice:** If seeking policy advice, consider using hypotheticals to present sensitive information. If there is a historical aspect to the purpose of the group’s formation, it may be beneficial to integrate a neutral presentation of that history and acknowledgment of the lack of consideration for community input in the past.

Evaluate the Process

Creating a Community Advisory Board is not a static process. It will change and improve overtime if the prosecutor is open to feedback. Approaches can be:

- **Informal Evaluations:** Conduct informal evaluations throughout the process and make improvements as needed. This can easily be done by simply asking the Board members for suggestions at the end of every meeting.
- **Formal Surveys:** Use formal surveys when the Board is first created and then at regular intervals to measure expectations and outcomes.