



OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARDS

FROM THE REPORT "COMMUNITY ADVISORY
BOARDS: WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOESN'T"

What are Community Advisory Boards?

Community advisory boards are groups of community representatives who meet with a policing agency to discuss public safety in a jurisdiction. Sometimes called "police-community advisory boards," "citizen advisory commissions," or "civilian advisory groups," these boards can be found across the country—from small townships to major metropolitan areas. CABs are one of the most common ways U.S. policing agencies engage the public.

What is the purpose of a Community Advisory Board?

Typically, CABs are purely advisory. They provide advice and recommendations to police leadership or other officials, but the suggestions are non-binding. Community members on these boards usually work on a voluntary basis and are not compensated for their time.

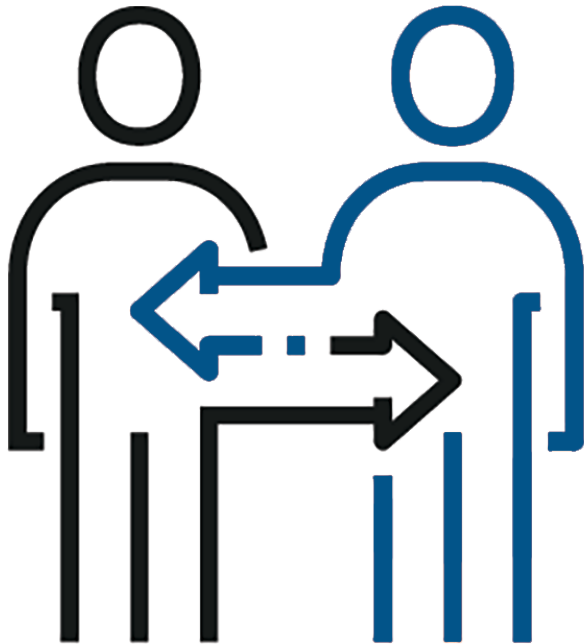
CABs are distinct from *citizen review boards*, which review complaints of misconduct, conduct investigations, or review the work of internal police disciplinary processes on the "back end," meaning after something has gone wrong. By contrast, CABs works on the "front end" to review policies and practices before police act.

Why are Community Advisory Boards created?

CABs often are established in the aftermath of a controversial incident of alleged police misconduct, such as a police shooting of an unarmed individual. These incidents can deepen the longstanding divide between the police and community members, particularly in low-income communities of color. Following such an incident, a policing agency may propose the formation of a CAB to send a message about accountability, identify and remedy the issues underlying the incident, and strengthen relationships with estranged communities. Even when not related directly to a specific event, CABs almost always are formed to address strained relationships between policing agencies and the communities they serve.

How are Community Advisory Boards structured?

CAB structures vary widely. Usually, the chief executive of a policing agency convenes and communicates directly with community members. But sometimes, a city ordinance or community initiative establishes a CAB.



How are Community Advisory Board members selected?

CAB members are appointed in a number of ways, and what process is utilized will likely affect how the CAB's performance is perceived. Most often, a chief or other executive will recruit and select members from various groups of stakeholders (e.g. neighborhood councils, affinity groups, etc.), though occasionally, city officials or affinity groups select CAB members. From the community's perspective, CAB members appointed by a policing agency may be seen as partisan and only serving the interests of the agency, whereas CAB members who are externally appointed are sometimes seen as more independent.

On the other hand, from the police perspective, CAB member appointments by city officials may be seen as politicized, and the police may feel CAB members are under the control of politicians.

Either option will affect the way the CAB is perceived, but acknowledging this beforehand can help to mitigate negative public perceptions of bias, political favor, partisanship, or nepotism in CAB appointments.

What do Community Advisory Boards do?

CABs typically perform three functions:

1. Bridge the Gap Between Police and Communities:

CABs provide a somewhat formal structure for community members to share their views and concerns. When police departments are not able to obtain the views of the community in one-on-one interactions, CABs can fill the gap. CABs are also a means for policing agencies to disseminate accurate information in crisis situations, either during an incident or during the subsequent investigation. CABs can be a legitimizing presence during the police department's crisis response, helping to promote trust and community buy-in.

2. Serve as a Sounding Board for Policing Agencies:

CABs frequently serve as a sounding board for a policing agency's leadership, and they occasionally weigh in on various policies and practices that an agency is considering. Whether an agency is responding to a controversial incident, or is contemplating a change in policy, a CAB can be a trusted body for honest advice on what to do and how best to do it. Many agencies work with their CABs to gauge public sentiment following critical incidents and help shape a more thoughtful response.

3. Facilitate Outreach for Community Events:

CABs also help police communicate with the public about upcoming events. Non-enforcement community engagement activities can contribute to building and maintaining relationships and community trust substantially. But to accomplish this type of engagement, the public must be made aware of opportunities to engage and be encouraged to attend. When CAB members with strong ties to their communities publicize and promote police-community engagement, events gain credibility and attendance improves.

[Read the full report at PolicingProject.org/CAB](https://PolicingProject.org/CAB)