

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF MEMBERS



Ending Child Abuse
and Neglect.


Maintaining a diverse and committed membership on Citizen Review Panels (CRP) is crucial to their success and to the impact they may have on supporting child welfare practice in the State. However, like any other group, issues that can get in the way of productivity do sometimes emerge. Here are some tips on recruiting and retaining strong members.

- ▶ **Remember why people volunteer in the first place.** CRP members generally volunteer to serve on a panel because they want to make a better life for the children, families, and the agencies that serve them in their State. Sometimes it is difficult for members to understand how their look at systemic issues leads to the better world that they envision. Make the link for them by consistently reporting back on how their recommendations have been implemented, or how the lives of children and child welfare staff have been or will be improved because of their work.
- ▶ **Have a focused and measurable strategic plan.** Nothing frustrates volunteers more than

committing their time to an unfocused, disorganized group. CRPs should consider having a strategic planning retreat each year in which they develop and articulate clear goals, objectives, timelines, and simple performance measures, i.e. what success looks like. The strategic plan should be a ‘living document,’ referred to and re-visited throughout the year as a way to keep Panels on track.

- ▶ **Be aware of and manage group dynamics.** CRPs are made up of people (and “personalities”). Don’t allow unhealthy group dynamics to take over or the Panel will flounder and run the risk of having good members leaving in frustration. Group conflict should be resolved as soon and as peaceably as possible. In addition to having a clear agenda for each meeting—ideally, one that clearly links to the strategic plan—work together under the Chair’s leadership to deal with problematic members (i.e., the “know it all,” “axe-grinder,” “rabbit chaser,” etc.). To head

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off problems, it may be useful to take the time to develop a set of statements on how the group agrees to conduct itself.

- ▶ **When recruiting new members, think outside the box.** Studies have shown that, overall, Citizen Review Panels are made up mostly of Caucasian, female, middle- to older-aged professionals who are mostly social workers (Jones & Royse, 2008). This speaks to the need to think about recruiting a diverse group of members. When thinking about ‘diversity,’ it is certainly appropriate to consider racial and ethnic diversity. However, diversity should be broadly defined to include members who represent different perspectives as they think broadly about the issues under discussion. For example, States should consider recruiting leaders in the faith community, law enforcement officers, school personnel, mental health professionals, former foster youth, former CPS workers and administrators, and qualified non-professionals, just to name a few.
- ▶ **Have fun and thank your members!** The work of the CRPs can be emotionally taxing. The subjects of child abuse and neglect, child fatalities, poverty, substance misuse, homelessness, and the other issues that come up constantly in dealing with child welfare system can lead to feelings of discouragement or hopelessness for Panel members. Panel meetings don’t have to be completely without humor or the opportunity for members to find enjoyment in them. And remember, people like to be thanked for their work. This doesn’t have to be elaborate: informal meals together, award ceremonies, interesting trainings and cards of thanks can go a long way in helping members feel valued.

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STATE SPOTLIGHT

KENTUCKY



The state of Kentucky has experienced a largely stable membership over the years. There are three CRPs in Kentucky: a statewide Panel and two regional Panels. The two regional Panels meet monthly over lunch and the statewide group meets quarterly. Each Panel has developed by laws which spell out the expectation of Panel members, terms limits, confidentiality and how decisions are made. Dr. Blake Jones, the Program Coordinator for Kentucky’s CRPs, says there are several reasons that membership has been so stable: *“First, I give credit to our Chairpersons, who facilitate the monthly meetings in a way that helps our members feel that their time is valuable. Also, we try to give lots of chances for members to serve on separate committees, or ‘working teams’ as we call them. This allows them to really focus on one narrow topic rather than feeling overwhelmed by their mandate. Finally, I really try to reach out to people who are not traditionally associated with the child welfare system, for example, the business community.”* He also noted, *“One of the best members I ever had was a law librarian. She didn’t know a whole lot about the child welfare system at first—which allowed her to be unbiased. She also LOVED to do research, which was a tremendous asset to our Panel.”*



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- ▶ **Ensure membership expectations, including membership terms, are clear.** It is important for CRPs to ensure members have a way to cycle off of the Panel. Citizen Review Panel membership should not be a “life sentence”! Panels should have by-laws that clearly state term limits for members; this not only allows a way for the Panel to deal with unproductive members, but also makes the commitment to the CRP time-limited. The prospect of serving on the Panel in a time-limited way can be particularly important in attracting someone who is busy and involved in many different aspects of community service.

For More Information

- ▶ National CRP Virtual Community: www.uky.edu/socialwork/crp.
- ▶ Specific information on your state’s efforts is available at the National CRP Virtual Community at www.uky.edu/socialwork/crp.
- ▶ The Children’s Bureau’s response to inquiries on CRPs can be found within the Child Welfare Program Manual (Child Welfare Policy Manual, Children’s Bureau: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/cwpm/programs/cb/laws_policies/laws/cwpm/index.jsp?idFlag=0).
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Additional Resources

- ▶ Administration for Children and Families. Establishment of the Citizen Review Panel Requirement Under the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act. January 7, 1998. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- ▶ Bryan, V., Jones, B.L., Allen, E. & Collins-Camargo, C. (2007) *Child and Youth Services Review*. Civic Engagement or Token Participation? Perceived Impact of the Citizen Review Panel Initiative in Kentucky. 29, 1286–1300.
- ▶ Bryan, V., Collins-Camargo, C., & Jones, B. (2011). Reflections on citizen-state child welfare partnerships: Listening to citizen review panel volunteers and agency liaisons. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 32, 1, 986–1010.
- ▶ Bryan, V., Jones, B.L. & Lawson. (2010). Key features of effective citizen–state child welfare partnerships: Findings from a national study of citizen review panels. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 32, 4, 595–603.
- ▶ Collins-Camargo, C., Jones, B.L., & Krusich, S. (2009). The “Spinach” of Citizen Participation in Public Child Welfare: Strategies for Involving Citizens in Public Child Welfare. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 3, 287–304.
- ▶ Jones, B. L. (2004) Variables Impacting the Effectiveness of Citizens Review Panels For Child Protective Services: A Multi-state Study. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 26, 12, 1117–1127.
- ▶ Jones, B.L. & Royse, D. (2008) Citizen review panels for child protective services: A national profile. *Child Welfare*, 87, 3, 143–162.
- ▶ Jones, B.L. & Royse, D. (2008) Citizen review panels: The connection between training and perceived effectiveness. *Child Abuse & Neglect: The International Journal*, 32, 1–2.
- ▶ World Volunteer Web: <http://www.worldvolunteerweb.org/browse/volunteering-issues/senior-volunteers/doc/16-tips-in-recruiting.html>.