

COMMUNICATING WITH EXTERNAL GROUPS



Ending Child Abuse and Neglect.

Citizen review panels (CRPs) cannot do their work in a vacuum. Ideally, CRPs should be connected with other groups of advocates and stakeholders in order to give their work more power. This tip sheet outlines a number of ways CRPs can reach out to external groups and foster communication with them.

► **Be aware of the CRP mission.** Citizen review panels were envisioned by Congress to provide external review of state child welfare policy, procedure, and practice. Although originally envisioned as “oversight” bodies, the CRPs have developed into collaborative groups of citizen volunteers and others who are interested in promoting better outcomes for families, children, and those who serve them. When thinking about which groups to communicate with, the CRPs should connect with those who share a similar mission. For example, foster care review boards offer a chance for citizens to voice their unique perspective on foster care cases, and many states

have external review boards in place through state law or by other means.

► **Polish your message.** As mentioned in earlier tip sheets, the mandate for the CRPs is quite large and, at times, vague. Some panels struggle with identifying manageable work products and producing measurable results. At their heart, CRPs should be about improving child welfare services in their states. This central message should be used in any communications with outside groups. Remember that people tend to get inundated with information, so it’s best to keep the message direct, positive, and informative. Spend some time with your panel testing out some simple messages that will connect the group with other interested stakeholders. For example, “citizens helping to improve child welfare services” or “coming together to improve the lives of children, families, and those who serve them” are brief messages that convey a powerful message of collaboration and good will.



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- ▶ **Connect individual CRP members with external groups.** This may happen naturally, but citizen review panels tend to attract members who also serve on other committees, task forces, etc. If there are members on your panel who are already serving on these types of groups, ask them to report at CRP meetings about their work with the other groups. Chairpersons of CRPs should also encourage cross-group collaboration among members. Simply put, there is strength in numbers, and the influence of CRPs can grow exponentially when they align themselves with others who are passionate about helping children and families.
- ▶ **Do collaborative projects with external groups.** As mentioned in tip #2, CRPs need recognition and publicity for their work. Additionally, the goodwill of CRP members can get lost in the

perception from child welfare administrators that they are out to do harm to the agency (see Collins-Camargo, Buckwalter, & Jones, 2016, for a discussion of child welfare administrators' perceptions of CRPs). A simple community service project (like a luggage drive for children in foster care or recognizing frontline child protective services workers) will go a long way in ameliorating the negative perceptions of CRPs and other groups.

Reference

- ▶ Collins-Camargo, C., Buckwalter, N., & Jones, B. (2016). Perceptions of state child welfare administrators regarding federally-mandated citizen review panels. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 62, 83–89. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.01.022>

Resources

- ▶ Cross-System Collaboration to Support Youth Involved With Child Welfare
<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/youth/collaboration>
This site offers helpful publications on issues such as mental health in youth, creating a master plan to be used by schools and others in comprehensively serving children, and supporting youth as they transition to adulthood.
- ▶ Community Partnerships for Protecting Children
<http://www.cssp.org/reform/child-welfare/community-partnerships-for-the-protection-of-children>
Community Partnership for Protecting Children is an example of the Center for the Study of Social Policy's efforts to promote community-oriented child welfare policies and practice. These partnerships seek to change the way communities think about how to protect children and to reform our nation's child welfare system.
- ▶ National Child Abuse and Neglect Technical Assistance and Strategic Dissemination Center (CANTASD)
<http://cantasd.org>
CANTASD is a service of the Children's Bureau, Office on Child Abuse & Neglect. Its focus is the "front end" of the child welfare system, creating resources and supporting peer learning activities—including the 20th National Conference on Child Abuse & Neglect—for those engaged in primary and secondary prevention, child protective services and investigation, and multidisciplinary and interagency collaborations to promote the safety and well-being of children, youth, and families.

STATE SPOTLIGHT

ALASKA



The Alaska Citizen Review Panel, under the leadership of Chair Diwakar Vadapalli, has reached out to numerous stakeholders. In addition to meeting with the Alaska Legislature, Alaska CRP meets with front-line workers, unit supervisors, and managers. Key people in leadership positions within the Child Protection Services (CPS) system are invited to present to the CRP on specific policies or practices throughout the year. In addition, the CRP meets with the leaders and staff of all mandated partners—legal fraternities; public safety, school, and local government personnel; service providers, and foster parents—from across the state. Each meeting is either an interview or a focus group discussion. CRP members lead these discussions with focused questions about the practices, policies, and procedures of the CPS system and relationships between the agency and its partners at all levels. To learn more, visit <http://www.crpalaska.org>.

Vadapalli offers these tips for working with external groups:

Be accessible. When attending events and presenting to groups in person is not possible, explore other ways of communicating. Set up a website or social media account as a way to encourage contact. Offer conference call access to panel meetings so that anyone with a telephone may participate.

Be clear on the limits. Be aware of potential overlap with other groups to avoid duplicating efforts. In Alaska, there are at least eight other review systems that oversee CPS and its work; Alaska CRP focuses its efforts on systemic review.

Be inclusive. Reach out to as many as possible in as many ways as possible. Forging connections with external groups and maintaining those relationships will promote broader recognition among child protection circles of the CRP and its role.