# THE ROLE OF ADVISORY BOARDS IN YOUR AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAM:
## WHAT THEY ARE AND HOW TO USE THEM // NOVEMBER 2016

## WHAT ARE ADVISORY BOARDS?

Advisory boards are utilized by organizations in every industry to serve as sounding boards and to bring ideas to the table while engaging the community in the work of the organization. Advisory boards may also have a small accountability role in reflecting on data or identifying ways to better meet stated goals.

In some cases, advisory boards are required by funders, as is the case with the 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant program. In the FY2017 Request for Proposals, the Iowa Department of Education requires an Advisory Council of all grantees stating that the Council should be "actively engaged in the development and implementation of the after-school program(s)."

## WHY HAVE AN ADVISORY BOARD?

Advisory boards have direct and indirect benefits to the convening organization. Direct benefits are the feedback and input provided from the advisory stakeholders. Indirect benefits come from engaging community stakeholders to create ownership of the program(s) being advised, as well as to develop champions for the work of the organization.

## HOW SHOULD THEY BE USED?

Advisory boards can provide feedback on activities that have already occurred and, thus, serve in an accountability role. They can also provide ideas through strategic input. All advice of the board should be aligned with the program's and organization's stated goals. Advisory boards can also be used to involve the community in the program and foster deeper buy-in through giving of resources, such as time in a volunteer capacity, or in funds. This should not be the primary role of the advisory board, however. The focus of the advisory board should be on input.

## FACILITATING ON-GOING ENGAGEMENT

» **Planning** – Organizations looking to convene an advisory board or boards should clearly outline the scope of the board's work, focusing on a program or aspect of programming. Membership should be defined prior to recruitment of individuals and should reflect the breadth of the scope. In some cases, like for 21CCLC, membership is somewhat defined. Organizations should also determine the frequency and scheduling of meetings to be able to articulate the time commitment to potential members. It is also important to prepare early for recruiting and facilitating the board, including developing materials for members that articulate program goals and any required activities (from a grant, perhaps). Preparation also requires pre-planned agendas and communications to members to most effectively using their time for maximum input.

» **Facilitating** – The role of the meeting facilitator, which may be a third party or the convener, is to maximize input by ensuring full and proportional participation of members. It is important that all members contribute to conversations and that voices that are often neglected are heard as peers among the group. This ensures that all members feel welcomed and acknowledged – a key to ultimate buy-in and ownership of the group. It is recommended that a chair be designated among the members to help develop and lead the agenda to further develop ownership and accountability. An agenda keeps everyone on topic and helps the facilitator to steer discussion back to the topic at hand. There should be opportunities on the agenda to reflect on activities that have already occurred and to provide input on programming for the future.

» **On-Going Engagement** – A particular challenge with advisory boards is sustaining engagement of the membership over time. A few best practices can help keep members participating over time, and even *more* engaged over time.

1. Make sure each meeting is time well spent. Be prepared, follow the agenda, and follow-up at each meeting with the outcomes of their input from the prior meeting. Show them that their time and input is valuable.

2. Be sure to recognize your advisory board members for their participation and input. Do this at program and/or organizational events, when your program or organization is recognized through media or in other communications, and in your own communications, such as newsletters. This keeps them accountable to showing up and gives them the deserved acknowledgement of their contributions.

3. Get regular feedback from members one-on-one. Regularly check-in with individual members from time-to-time to see how things are going, gauge their on-going interest, and personally thank them for all they've contributed. This ensures you have a good personal relationship with each member and that you are monitoring the success of the group in this way.

4. Ask for involvement in other ways. Although not the focus of being on an advisory board, ask them to be involved with the program in other ways if you think they will be interested. Ask them to volunteer with your program. This will help establish connections between the advisory board members and those you serve. If they have the capacity, ask them to fund a specific activity or project within your program. Just make sure to follow-up with them regarding the outcomes of their investment. Show them that their involvement mattered.