# Strategies for Presenting Research to Community Advisory Boards (CABs): Practical Tips from an HIV-focused CAB

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**ABSTRACT**

Community-based participatory research (CBPR) emphasizes building collaborative, equitable partnerships between researchers and community experts. Community advisory boards (CABs) are integral to CBPR. The University of California, Los Angles-Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science Center for AIDS Research (UCLA-CDU CFAR)'s standing CAB consists of community experts, most with lived experience, across Los Angeles County, California. The UCLA-CDU CFAR CAB provides input on CFAR members' individual research projects, in contrast to study-specific CABs, which are dedicated to specific research projects. The CAB developed best practices for researchers on how to present to standing CABs, including general communication strategies and guidance for pre- and post-presentation activities (e.g., slide preparation, post-meeting follow-up). The strategies were developed and refined over numerous research presentations, for adaptation by other community-academic teams. Use of these strategies can lead to more productive partnerships with CABs and facilitate meaningful community feedback on research from initiation to completion.

**KEYWORDS:** Community-Based Participatory Research, Community Advisory Boards, Health disparities, Community health partnerships, HIV/AIDS, Pacific States

## Introduction

The field of community-based participatory research (CBPR) has identified characteristics of community partnerships that lead to successful research, including community advisory board (CAB) engagement. CABs are composed of community experts who help shape research to be relevant to participants' lived experiences, to benefit communities, and disseminate research results in a culturally appropriate and accessible manner.[1,2] CAB members play a critical role as objective, external content experts and are distinct from community partners who are part of the study team (e.g., as paid Co-Investigators) and from participants, who are not on equitable footing with study investigators. CABs have a rich history in HIV research, providing input (e.g., on medication trials) since the 1980s.[3]

CBPR emphasizes seeking authentic community input throughout the research process, in contrast to symbolic engagement, in which, for example, researchers work with CABs transactionally (e.g., for funding requirements, career advancement).[4] Academic authors have advanced best practices for formation, operation, and maintenance of CABs[5-8] and provided case studies on experiences working with study-specific CABs on specific projects.[7,9-11] However, few manuscripts provide specific, concrete guidance for researchers who genuinely wish to have in-depth research discussions with CABs.

In the present paper, which was written in partnership with the National Institutes of Health (NIH)-funded University of California, Los Angeles-Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science (UCLA-CDU) Center for AIDS Research (CFAR) CAB, we provide recommendations for best practices for research presentations to standing CABs (a "Tip Sheet" practical tool). Standing CABs are convened for research centers or institutions in order to obtain input on new or ongoing projects that are conducted by members of the organization and that are

relevant to the organizational mission.[5,12-14] Given the effort and funding required to form, operate, and sustain study-specific CABs (which are typically convened by an individual academic investigator for their own research project), researchers may be more likely to be exposed to CBPR and CAB engagement through standing CABs. However, study-specific CABs have received more attention in the CBPR literature than standing CABs.[5]

Our recommendations are based on the wealth of experiences of expert CAB members in observing research presentations and can be tailored and generalized for use with other CABs. Prior published recommendations tend to be written by researchers, to inform researchers how to form and engage with CABs.[5-8] Although a few publications about CABs have included community partners or CAB members with lived experience (e.g., people with HIV) as co-authors,[9] many, including CAB case studies, only include authors with academic affiliations, or community members who serve populations with lived experiences, rather than community members themselves.[3,5,7,8,11,14-17] The present paper centers and elevates the voices of CAB members in describing their standards for research presentations that may result in optimal community engagement, which in turn can lead to more impactful research.

## Methods

**CAB Description**. The UCLA-CDU CFAR CAB ("DA CAB"), formed in June, 2021, uses a broad community model[3] that involves a range of community content experts with lived experience. The CAB's name ("DA CAB") is a tribute to the memory of Darrin Aiken, a beloved community member and the first lead CAB member, who passed away in July, 2021. CAB members undergo a formal application process and are required to be (1) a client of HIV care or prevention services, and/or (2) representative of a group impacted by the HIV epidemic in Los Angeles County, CA (a high-priority jurisdiction under the US Ending the HIV Epidemic

initiative[18]), including African American and Latino/a/e individuals, young minority men who have sex with men, transgender women and men, cisgender women of color, and people who use substances. Many CAB members are experts in community engagement and have collectively contributed to dozens of research projects across multiple CABs over the course of the epidemic.

**Primary CAB Activities**. The UCLA-CDU CAB's mission is to foster a supportive and inclusive environment that promotes HIV education, awareness, and advocacy. The CAB provides essential guidance on Ending the Epidemic initiatives, including shaping HIV treatment and prevention research agendas in Los Angeles County, helping to disseminate research findings, and ensuring access to affected communities. CAB activities are interconnected: Engagement with researchers builds capacity and understanding for research, which leads to stronger dissemination efforts—while CAB engagement increasing researchers' understanding of community priorities and needs, resulting in higher-quality research.

The CAB meets monthly online for two hours, with one in-person retreat annually. CAB meetings cover a variety of topics, such as researcher presentations, planning activities (e.g., for local conferences to educate community members and disseminate research findings), and input to CFAR leadership (e.g., feedback on website, review of funding announcements and proposals). A key activity is to foster open dialogue and collaboration between community members and researchers on individual research projects. Researchers engage with the CAB, for example, to elicit discussion about study ideas and obtain letters of support for proposals; researchers also seek guidance on methods when starting projects and on study progress throughout projects, and to interpret results at the end of projects. In short, the CAB provides an invaluable opportunity to researchers to not only obtain meaningful feedback, but also to build researcher capacity to convey project goals and disseminate results in a manner that community

members—both internal and external to the CAB—can easily digest.

**CAB Roles**. CAB members select a lead CAB member to represent the CAB in the CFAR's national, executive committee, and core meetings, as well as to help set CAB meeting agendas and review relevant materials (e.g., slides) prior to meetings. The CAB coordinator, a licensed clinical social worker and dedicated ally, has a wealth of experience coordinating CABs. The CAB coordinator serves as the CAB point-of-contact, collaborates with the lead CAB member on setting CAB agendas and reviewing pre-meeting materials, conducts meeting logistics (e.g., reminders, meeting links, post-meeting feedback surveys), and helps CAB members prepare for presentations (e.g., about the Tip Sheet). The CAB coordinator also organized the process to determine CAB by-laws, which were agreed upon by all members and include, for example, criteria for membership and standards for participation (e.g., active participation in each meeting).

**CAB Member Compensation**. Compensation of CAB members is essential to demonstrate that community members' expertise and time are as equally valued, important, and respected as researchers' expertise. CAB members receive a small honoraria after each meeting, and the lead CAB member receives an annual stipend. Some researchers provide additional incentives (e.g., cash, gift cards) if more time is needed than allocated during a CAB meeting for discussion of their study, or if a large amount of materials are being reviewed.

**Development of a Communication Strategies Tip Sheet and Article.** CAB members compiled communication strategies for research presentations to CABs in the form of a "Tip Sheet," based on their combined expertise accumulated from observations of numerous research presentations. Many researchers who presented to the CAB did not seem to have training in or awareness about the need for bi-directional CAB engagement; for example, they used complex

scientific jargon and acronyms, and did not allot time for questions or discussion. Thus, the CAB was not able to provide meaningful feedback, which they felt was was a missed opportunity and unproductive for both researchers and CAB members.

To develop the Tip Sheet, the CAB coordinator (SJ), along with the former (LR) and current (SP) lead CAB members, started a preliminary list of tips based on CAB suggestions about how to improve researcher presentations. The list was further refined, edited, and expanded by all CAB members based on continued discussions and presentations in monthly meetings. A draft of the Tip Sheet was shared with several CFAR researchers (including LMB), who provided further suggestions for refinement (e.g., adding explanations for each tip) and encouraged publication of the tips so that other CABs and researchers could benefit. A CFAR researcher (LMB) then co-led the writing of this article with SJ, SP, and LR, and provided a literature review. All CAB co-authors provided feedback, including wording and content suggestions, on the manuscript draft.

After implementing use of the Tip Sheet, CAB members saw noticeable improvements in the quality of researcher presentations, with researchers providing materials and concrete guidance about their requests to the CAB ahead of time (e.g., drafts of flyers and letters of support) as well as updates about any changes made as a result of CAB input.

The CAB defined effective presentations as two-way dialogues in which CAB members, are given opportunities to better understand the study background, goals, and results, such that they can inform all phases of the project with their community-based expertise. In contrast, ineffective research presentations are characterized by one-way didactic presentations in which the researcher talks more than CAB members do, with minimal discussion (few or no questions asked), and CAB members do not understand what is being presented or what is being asked of

them sufficiently to contribute.

## Results

**Tip Sheet Overview.** The Tip Sheet has two main components: recommended communication strategies and concrete presentation guidance, along with explanations (Table 1). A primary theme running through the strategies is to tailor the presentation to the CAB, clearly conveying the purpose of the research and questions, and being open to ongoing bi-directional engagement that may result in tangible suggestions.

**Presentation Development**. The Tip Sheet provides a roadmap for researchers when developing their presentation, in terms of practical, concrete presentation guidance on how to translate communication strategies into practice. For example, the guidance includes suggestions to state the study purpose in plain terms, minimize scientific jargon, abbreviations, and acronyms, and speak slowly and clearly. In addition to suggestions about communication during the presentation, the Tip Sheet includes descriptions of pre-meeting activities (e.g., on slide preparation, such as using 3-5 brief bullet points) and post-meeting activities (e.g., immediate and long-term follow-up, to maintain an ongoing relationship). Prior to the presentation, the CAB needs to review materials that will be presented, with sufficient time to suggest edits.

**Ensuring Bi-Directional Engagement**. A key strategy is to create a slide that prompts the researcher to pause, and the CAB to ask questions; this reminds researchers to allow time for dialogue and catalyzes CAB members to ask questions throughout the presentation rather than only at the end, which results in greater real-time understanding of the topic and thus better feedback. Specific discussion questions are also critical. If researchers do not leave time for discussion and do not clearly explain their study or what they want from the CAB, the CAB may assume the researcher is not interested in engaging with the CAB and is merely looking for a

"rubber stamp" approval to proceed without community input.

**Adaptation for other CABs**. To adapt these strategies for other CABs, at a minimum researchers need to understand the background, composition, and purpose of the CAB—and collaborate with CAB members on the adaptation. For example, a CAB composed of healthcare providers may have a different knowledge base than a CAB composed of community members, and thus, some terminology may not need to be defined. Overall, the Tip Sheet needs to be tailored to (and by) the CAB—who they are, who they represent, and what they already know, as well as the type of research being conducted.

## Discussion

The present paper extends prior CBPR research by providing specific recommendations to researchers for effective communication in the context of CAB meetings. Our tips can result in better community understanding and engagement regarding research, potentially leading to increased community trust in the scientific process and of researchers,[2] and community empowerment and autonomy to enact change. Although the Tip Sheet has not been formally evaluated, the UCLA-CDU CFAR CAB has observed tangible changes in meetings after implementing its use (e.g., more understandable presentations, insightful discussions, and favorable researcher responses). Thus, we believe that efforts of researchers to follow these suggestions will ultimately result in more impactful research that better reflects community members' lived experiences.

In the present project, CAB members advanced presentation strategies as a reaction to academic presenters using jargon and unfamiliar scientific terms. Such experiences have been discussed in prior literature as a barrier to CAB member effectiveness and retention[6,14,17]; for example, as early as 2003, a qualitative interview study indicated that CAB members'

understanding and engagement was impeded by technical language in research presentations, and CAB members suggested training researchers in communication skills for community engagement.[3] CBPR methodology guidance has similarly suggested using non-technical language and visual aids to convey scientific ideas plainly, to make science more accessible for lay people, and to mobilize community members to actively engage in and disseminate research.[4,17]

To facilitate CAB input on individual studies, researchers could offer opportunities to CAB members to be trained in research methods, consistent with recommendations from CBPR.[10,16,19] Trainings could build CAB capacity to not only understand research findings but also to engage in effective dissemination. CAB members may not be familiar with the scientific underpinnings of the topic or with CBPR principles; arming CAB members with fundamental research principles could result in richer CAB contributions.

CAB discussions with researchers can lead to novel insights that change the direction of a study or determine next steps for research. One way to center the voices of community experts in research, and provide credit for such ideas, is to engage and build capacity for CAB members to be co-authors. The low number of CAB co-authors in the CBPR methods literature may be based in researchers' assumption that CAB members do not want to participate in paper-writing—or that they do not have the skills to do so. Yet, under relevant professional academic associations' authorship guidelines, writing is not required for authorship. Under the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors' (ICMJE) authorship guidelines,[20] community co-authors who make "substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work" or help with "interpretation of data"; who provide a "critical review of the paper for important intellectual content"; who provide "final approval of the version to be published"; and who agree "to be accountable for all

aspects of the work..." would meet all four ICMJE authorship criteria, regardless of whether they directly write text. Thus, assumptions that CAB members do not know how to write in an academic journal article style are not warranted for denying CAB members authorship, who must be recognized as providing their intellectual expertise to the research.

This paper advances recommendations for researchers on productive communications with CABs, so that CAB members can meaningfully inform research projects from conception to completion. Research trainings for CAB members, including on dissemination of study findings to the scientific community, would be invaluable in enabling CAB members to have a lasting legacy in research, through inclusion on scientific publications that recognize their intellectual insights. Failure to adequately engage with and train CAB members on the research process may result in reduced community trust, misunderstanding of research, lack of community buy-in, and insufficient dissemination of findings. Doing so will lead to more fruitful and authentic CAB partnerships that ultimately can advance health equity.

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**Table 1. Tip Sheet of Recommended Communication Strategies and Practical Guidance for Research Presentations to CABs**

| Communication Strategy | Presentation Guidance | Explanation |
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| *Provide written information about your project in advance of your presentation.* Materials should be shared preferably one-week before and no later than 3 days prior to the CAB meeting. | Pre-presentation-related materials:<br>• One-page (or less) project summary with description of what you want from the CAB.<br>• Abstract, if available; does not replace summary.<br>• Glossary of terms specific to study.<br>• Any other materials for which feedback is requested that are approved to share outside of the study team (e.g., flyers, website content/links). | • CAB representatives need sufficient time to review and request changes as needed before the meeting.<br>• CAB members will be able to think about, digest, internalize, and clarify what is being asked of them ahead of time; they can only provide useful input as content experts if they are properly prepared.<br>• Sharing written materials enables and inspires CAB members who wish to learn more about the topic and/or study on their own. |
| *Make the presentation accessible and easily digestible, with simple, user-friendly words that anyone can understand*. Assume CAB members do not know about your presentation topic. Keep in mind that you are creating a presentation specifically tailored for the CAB, even if it is not the usual presentation you give about this study. | Slide presentation:<br>• Ideally use 3-5 short bullets per slide, in at least 14-point readable font (e.g., Calibri, Arial).<br>• Use visuals (e.g., photos, infographics) when possible and keep scientific diagrams simple.<br>• Spell out and explain all acronyms and abbreviations, such as in parentheses immediately following their use<br>• Keep use of scientific terms, | • Meeting the CAB where they are allows them to feel respected and capable, and encourages more participation and sharing of their relevant expertise, versus making them feel that what they have to say is not important, or that their contributions are inadequate.<br>• Defining all scientific terms helps expand the capacity and learning of CAB members and allows them to contribute (and disseminate results) in a meaningful manner<br>• Tailoring your presentation to be easily digestible and understandable |

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| | abbreviations, and acronyms to a minimum.<br>• Use a reading level that allows all to contribute (e.g., 6th grade).<br>During the presentation:<br>• Speak slowly and clearly.<br>• Keep in mind that the topic may not be easy to understand, and English may not be the first language of all CAB members. | will allow for a more fruitful discussion that benefits everyone—both researchers and CAB members. |
| *Clearly convey the purpose of the research*: Share with the CAB why you wanted to do *this* study, and what you hope to learn from it. | • The purpose of the presentation should be shared in advance (in the abstract and summary) and at the beginning of the presentation (on a slide). | • The CAB would like to fully understand what is being conveyed, which will enable, encourage, and empower them to provide feedback and share the information in their communities. |
| *Expect and welcome active CAB participation, and be specific about the questions for which you want CAB input*: Come with specific discussion questions, and be open to CAB feedback in general, as well as on other aspects of the project that you do not ask about specifically. | • Build pauses (e.g., Q&A slides) into your presentation, such as after each subsection, allowing time for as many CAB members who wish to ask questions to do so.<br>• Include slides with specific questions for the CAB, and make sure to pause after asking questions, to give CAB members time to formulate responses.<br>• Include a slide with the study name and contact information for CAB members to reach | • Bring specific discussion questions, as well as directly request feedback, to facilitate bi-directional dialogue (versus a didactive session in which researcher talks "at" instead of "with" the CAB) and shows that the researcher is genuinely interested in CAB input.<br>• Elicit ongoing discussion throughout the presentation to allow questions to be clarified in real time, versus waiting until the end of the presentation, when CAB members may not remember to ask specific points from earlier in the presentation |

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| | out if they have additional questions or comments. | and the questions may be out of context. |
| *Keep your presentation brief, and be mindful of the CAB's time constraints*: Plan to stay within your timeslot. The CAB also will try to stay on time as much as possible. | • Keep presentation within allotted time (suggested: 30 minutes or less, plus 15 minutes for discussion)<br>• Practice and time yourself in advance. | • Existing CABs often have multiple items on meeting agendas, such as research presentations and discussions about other responsibilities (e.g., proposal review) and CAB-related business.<br>• Presentations that are brief and to-the-point are more likely to hold members' attention. |
| *Follow up with the CAB soon after the meeting and be open to additional suggestions*. After the meeting is over, make sure to follow through on any action items, such as forwarding materials or sending more comprehensive responses to questions asked. | • Let the CAB know how you prefer to receive their feedback, should you wish to receive more feedback than was provided during the meeting.<br>• Email the CAB after the meeting to thank them for allowing you to attend their meeting, and to follow up on any questions or points that were not resolved during the meeting. | • Show gratitude to the CAB for being willing to trust you to share their expertise, in-depth input, and insights based on their lived experiences. |
| *Foster a long-term relationship with the CAB.* The CAB relationship is ongoing and does not have to end after your presentation. | • Tell CAB when the study ends.<br>• Share final results with the CAB, and preliminary results before the end of the study, as well as funding decisions on proposals.<br>• Explain how CAB input was used or why it was not | • CAB members appreciate hearing how their feedback was used or not used, to inform their ongoing work and refine their feedback for other researchers<br>• CAB members need to know what results to disseminate in their communities, as well as when to stop sharing study materials such as flyers with potential participants. |

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| | addressed.<br>• Consider acknowledging the CAB in publications and presentations (and ask for permission as well as how the CAB wishes to be acknowledged).<br>• Engage with the CAB on any next steps for the research. | |