

Technical Assistance Snapshot: Engaging Survivors to Serve on an Advisory Board

The SAVES Center's Technical Assistance (TA) Snapshots offer topic-specific guidance and answers common questions from grantees. In this TA Snapshot, we offer practical solutions to challenges many public agencies face when engaging survivors on advisory boards. Typical challenges include providing sufficient information in outreach documents without making them too lengthy, encouraging applicants to submit responses to numerous questions, compensating survivors without affecting their public benefits, ensuring confidentiality and privacy for survivors, and creating an accessible process to engage survivors.

Recruitment

Challenge

How can we provide context and background information to potential applicants without discouraging them from participating in the advisory board due to the length and number of questions in our outreach documents?

Potential Solution

Ensure that your recruitment and application processes do not burden survivors with specific requirements that other advisory board members do not face. Consider hosting informational sessions with a domestic violence agency to meet potential applicants and share information verbally. You can also provide a one-page flier or a video explanation of the project. Review your application questions to eliminate unnecessary ones and allow video submissions or conduct interviews. Decide what information you need in writing and what can be gathered through conversations.



Accessibility

Challenge

How can we ensure that anyone who wants to participate in the advisory board has the opportunity to be considered?

Potential Solution

Directly ask survivors what they need to participate and commit to providing those supports. For example, hold meetings at a time that works for survivors, provide childcare reimbursement and transportation, hold meetings in a fully accessible location, and use language interpreters or translators as needed. Budget for continued use of those supports throughout the project. Avoid over-reliance on written materials, particularly technical materials, to accommodate varying levels of literacy.

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Compensation

Challenge

How can we compensate survivors without affecting their eligibility for public benefits?

Potential Solution

Some federal funding allows for "participant assistance" to survivors in the form of payments made to vendors on behalf of the survivor. This assistance can be linked to addressing a need related to victimization or provided solely based on a stipulated need. For example, an agency could pay for a survivor's rent, purchase groceries, cover utilities expenses, or assist with educational costs. To explore this and other strategies, such as using gift cards as compensation, consult with your TA provider. Before adopting these strategies, obtain approval from your program officer.



Confidentiality

Challenge

How do we ensure confidentiality for survivors who join the advisory board?

Potential Solution

It might not be possible to assure confidentiality, but you can take steps to protect privacy. Consult with your General Counsel's Office to determine what information is private versus public for survivors applying to or participating in a council or advisory board. Some materials from your meetings may be subject to a public records request. Discuss the specifics with survivors and establish a written agreement that outlines what steps you will take to protect their privacy, what the limitations are, and their options to revoke the agreement. Establish group agreements for the council/board that prioritize the sensitivity of personal stories while using the information to guide and inform the work you are doing.