CBCAP State Lead Agencies and their Boards:
Powerful Partners for Prevention

Boards have powerful roles to play in the success of Community Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) State Lead Agencies. They are designed to be important resources and can provide oversight, strong connections to the community and other stakeholders and important information and supports. They may even be the guiding force of the organization. Conversely, when they are unstructured and do not receive careful attention, boards can become ineffective, time-consuming and difficult.

It is important for CBCAP Lead Agencies to harness the individual and collective power that boards can bring to their work. This requires a clearly defined role and supports from the staff to assist board members in effectively fulfilling their role. This document contains descriptive information regarding types of boards and strategies for promoting their success. It is designed for staff and board members of CBCAP State Lead Agencies.

CBCAP State Lead Agencies are based in a variety of legal and organizational structures. These may include private non-profits such as 501(c)3s, state agencies, governor’s offices, state cabinet councils or some combination or variation of these. Most CBCAP State Lead Agencies work with one or more boards in some capacity. The composition and size of their boards may vary greatly depending on their authorizing legislation, funding and other factors. The boards may be described in state legislation or may be ad hoc groups that are sub-groups of a larger board. Some boards have fiduciary responsibility and oversight for the executive director. Some have more limited responsibilities and make recommendations that are then approved, or not, by the governor or some other state entity. Others are set up to be completely advisory in nature. Some State Lead Agencies work with more than one board - with oversight boards and additional advisory boards related to specific programs or issues.

There are benefits to the varying sizes of boards. Small boards may allow for meaningful membership and involvement, foster unity and ownership and be easier to manage. Larger boards may provide greater opportunities for diversity of culture, ethnicity, skill sets, geographic representation and gender. In addition, larger numbers of board members may mean more people are available to contribute to the Lead Agency’s work.
Key Questions for CBCAP State Lead Agencies

To fully understand the type of board, the legal functions, the membership requirements and the anticipated role of boards, it is important for CBCAP State Lead Agencies to be able to respond to the following questions:

- What does the authorizing legislation say about the board’s role, function and membership, if there is authorizing legislation for the State Lead Agency?
- What is the board’s legal authority and responsibility under IRS rules and regulations if those apply to the State Lead Agency?
- Does the board understand its role?
- Is the board fully utilizing the power and strength ascribed to it in fulfilling its responsibilities?
- How diverse is the board membership? Does it include representatives from all groups whose voices and perspectives are important to the success of the State Lead Agency, including that of parent leaders?
- Does the skill set of the board members include all of those that are needed to support the State Lead Agency in its work?

Types of Boards

Although there are many different types of boards, they generally fall into two broad categories - Boards of Directors and Advisory Boards. Encompassed within these categories are wide variations of board models. In general, Boards of Directors are formal, legal structures that have two basic responsibilities: governance and support. The board as a whole governs the organization and its individual members provide support. Advisory boards have primary roles of advising and supporting the organization or program, but they usually do not have legal responsibilities for governance. They are important components of a CBCAP State Lead Agency and, to be most effective, they should have strong linkages with the governance structure. Much of the information in this document applies to all types of boards although it may be listed in primary relationship to either a Board of Directors or an Advisory Board. The legal commitments and responsibilities between the two types of boards are the primary difference but their needs for effective functioning have many similarities.

To make effective use of the different types of boards, the key for CBCAP State Lead Agencies is to:

- Know the structure of the agency’s board(s). This includes understanding authorizing or enabling legislation, its limitations and requirements, the legal structure of the agency and the bylaws of the board.
- Ensure that members of the board bring the strengths, connections and diversity that are needed. Depending on the structure of the agency, the CBCAP State Lead Agency may or may not be able to select its own board members. In most private non-profit organizations, the board elects its own members and officers. In public agencies, board appointments may be made by the governor or some other authorized state entity. If this is the case, the State Lead Agency will benefit from identifying and recommending for board membership key individuals with the capacity to meet the needs of the agency. For example, if the appointing authority is the governor’s office or a department director in a state system, be sure they are educated about the agency’s needs, member expectations and other requirements of this particular board. Current board members also can be effective in communicating this information. It is important to stress the need for diversity among board members, including ensuring that parents have a voice on the board.

Sometimes, the authorizing language stipulates specific individuals in key roles that are to be appointed to the board. Even in those cases, there may be open board positions that can be used to fill any gaps in the diversity and skill sets of the board. It is sometimes possible to create an additional advisory board that will address needs that are not met by the legislated board and can provide broader perspectives and input.
**CBCAP State Lead Agencies and Their Boards**

- **Provide clarity for the board regarding its roles and responsibilities.** Boards must have a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities, the expectations for board members and the results the agency seeks from its board. This is particularly critical if you are considering having parent representation on the board for the first time. Tools such as written role descriptions, commitment agreements, board orientations, ongoing training and board evaluation help boards to effectively do their best work. The goal is for each CBCAP State Lead Agency to have an informed, empowered and engaged board, whether it is a formal Board of Directors or an Advisory Board.

**Boards of Directors**

The primary role of Boards of Directors is the stewardship of the organization. Stewardship is managing resources that belong to someone else. In this case, it means assuring that the legal, financial and operational health and capabilities of the CBCAP State Lead Agency are well. It also means ensuring that the agency achieves its mission of preventing child abuse and neglect. The organization belongs to the community it serves and its board members, or stewards, provide assurances and oversight to ensure that it is healthy, strong and functions effectively.

In carrying out board responsibilities, there are three primary duties that board members are entrusted with: duties of care, loyalty and obedience.

- **Duty of Care:** Board members should carry out their duties with care and prudence. This means they regularly attend board meetings, actively participate in the organization’s activities, demonstrate reasonable inquiry and use their best judgment to carry out their work.

- **Duty of Loyalty:** Board members should provide their undivided loyalty to the CBCAP State Lead Agency and not use information acquired for personal gain. It is critical to avoid conflicts of interest or even the appearance of a conflict of interest. A real or perceived conflict of interest may involve a board member profiting from his or her relationship with the agency or encouraging decisions of the agency that will ultimately result in financial or other type of reward for the board member that would not have been available had he or she not been on the board. For example, a board member who is also the executive director of a community-based agency must be careful to avoid any discussion or vote on any funding request submitted by his or her agency.

- **Duty of Obedience:** Board members should be faithful to the CBCAP State Lead Agency’s mission and represent the public’s interest. This includes following the organization’s governing documents such as enabling legislation, articles of incorporation, by-laws, policies or other guidelines that ensure the funds are spent for lawful and mission driven work.

For CBCAP State Lead Agencies with Boards of Directors, there should be a clear distinction between governance and management. Governance means to guide or provide direction and oversight and is the charge of the Board of Directors. The central role of the agency management is to carry out the direction of the board. This is an administrative function that also addresses the day to day operations of the organization and should be the sole responsibility of the agency’s executive and staff. These two roles are separate and distinct. When there is a blurring of these roles and lines of authority, the agency may experience conflict and confusion. This is best addressed early on with board members through orientation for new board members, ongoing training and technical assistance, board policies and an annual evaluation of the board’s activities and practices to ensure board members fully understand and are fulfilling their roles and responsibilities.

Examples of a Board of Director’s responsibilities related to governance include:

- Determining the organization’s mission and vision—It is useful for the board to review the mission and vision on a regular basis to be sure it fits their current focus of work and that the agency’s work is directed toward fulfilling the mission and vision.
Engaging in strategic thinking and planning – This should take place formally on a regular basis and the board should develop plans and guidelines that support it and the organization as a whole in implementing strategies that support the agency’s mission.

Overseeing compliance with laws and regulations– Boards of Directors are responsible for ensuring that the agency meets all IRS requirements, state government requirements and other regulations that relate to their agency’s work.

Ensuring adequate human and financial resources– This relates to the board’s oversight and accountability for the agency’s resources– ensuring there is adequate funding and there are appropriate human resources for meeting the agency’s mission.

Monitoring the agency’s performance – Boards of Directors have oversight responsibility to ensure that the agency is functioning as effectively as possible and that it is focusing its work toward meeting the agency mission.

Providing financial oversight and ensuring transparency– Boards of Directors are responsible for regularly reviewing the financial statements of the agency and ensuring that there are adequate resources to allow the agency to work toward achieving it’s mission of preventing child abuse and neglect. To build public trust, it is also important that the boards have conflict of interest policies and that any fiscal dealings with board members are transparent and approved by the full board.

Selecting, supporting and evaluating the executive director– The most important partnership in any agency is that of the Board of Directors and the executive director. Their strong partnership will help ensure that the agency functions effectively and efficiently and will generate smooth communication and decision-making. It is the Board of Director’s responsibility to make the best possible selection of the executive director, provide direction and support as needed and evaluate regularly to ensure that the agency receives the strongest leadership possible. Evaluations may be conducted jointly with the executive director and the board may offer support as needed to assist the executive director in meeting agency goals.

Conducting a periodic board self-assessment– It is important that boards periodically assess their own performance as a group. There are formal tools available through many larger United Way organizations and others are available through resources listed in the reference section at the end of this document.

In addition to the work of the Board of Directors as a whole, individual board members can contribute in numerous ways to strengthen and support the agency, including:

Contributing their time, talent, treasure and contacts – Board members who are truly committed to the agency will want to contribute their individual time as well as to offer the agency the benefit of their particular skills and talents. It is important that members of Boards of Directors make a financial contribution to the agency. The size of the contribution is less important than the need for 100% of all board members to make some sort of contribution. This may mean that for board members of lesser economic means, the contribution is very small. Even a contribution of $1.00 allows the agency to say that 100% of the board members contribute financially to the agency and this is an important statement to make when seeking funds from others. In addition, many board members have personal and business contacts with others who can be of great support to helping the agency fulfill its mission. It is important that members help the agency build linkages with these contacts and reach out to seek assistance for the agency as needed.

Acting as an ambassador for the organization and its constituents – Every board member should be able to describe the agency’s mission and work in a few short sentences. It is also important that board members know pertinent statistics and can describe
a few examples of the work taking place. Board members are powerful representatives of the agency and can help promote the agency’s mission and goals in their interactions with friends, business associates and others. They form a vital link between the agency and other important audiences.

- Promoting mutual accountability among board colleagues – It is important for board members to know the board’s roles and responsibilities and help each other fulfill their roles. Board colleagues can encourage and support each other in bringing their strongest contributions to the agency.

- Acting as a sounding board for executive staff – When board members and executive staff have strong partnerships with a focus on the mission of the agency, they can be joint problem solvers and can think and strategize together effectively.

- Promoting a culture of inclusion – Board members can each take personal responsibility for ensuring that the board is inclusive of everyone’s culture and perspective in its decision making process and communication structure.

- Ensuring board sustainability and vitality - Board members can support the agency’s work by taking an active role in maintaining the esprit de corp of the group, affirming the value of the work of fellow board members and staff and actively recruiting potential future board members.

Members of effective boards are knowledgeable, involved, and passionate about the mission. They recognize and respect the clear distinctions between management and governance and the need for both. They also significantly add to an organization’s success in accomplishing its mission by balancing their roles of oversight and of support for the agency.

**Advisory Boards**

Advisory Boards are known by a number of names- Advisory Boards, Councils, Committees, Groups and Task Forces. They may serve to provide advice or recommendations about certain topics, address specific activities or oversee a project. If the CBCAP State Lead Agency is embedded in a large state service system, their only board structure may be an Advisory Board. Non-profit State Lead Agencies may have a governing board and also have an advisory board that focuses on specific aspects of the agency’s work. Sometimes Advisory Boards can provide a method for associating influential names or power brokers with the agency. Their membership may be the result of a political appointment. Advisory boards generally have much less authority than governing boards and can be either formal or informal. However, advisory board members should fully understand the extent of their decision-making power and their role in making recommendations. The value of the input and support they provide make advisory boards a rich resource for CBCAP State Lead Agencies.

In order for the CBCAP State Lead Agency to gain the most value from its Advisory Board members and for the members to feel successful in their roles, the following tips are recommended:

- Assist the board in developing plans and monitoring them in an organized way, as would be the case if the Advisory Board were a Board of Directors.

- Organize and focus the work of the Advisory Board by clearly linking it with the mission, goals and work plan of the State Lead Agency.

- Maintain the active involvement of strong board members by making sure they have meaningful roles and understand the importance of their contributions to the agency.

**Twelve Principles of Exceptional Boards**

Most strong, thriving CBCAP State Lead Agencies devote time and attention to building and sustaining effective boards – whether their structure calls for a Board of Directors and/or an Advisory Board. BoardSource is a private non-profit organization that increases the effectiveness of non-profit organizations by strengthening boards of directors through training, technical assistance, tools and publications. They have a useful web site at http://www.boardsource.org/. BoardSource has developed key
principles for an exceptional board that is a strategic asset to an agency, whether the board is a governing Board of Directors or an Advisory Board. These have been adapted below to apply to CBCAP State Lead Agencies.

1. **Constructive Partnership:** Recognize that the effectiveness of the board and executive director are interdependent. That partnership is built on trust, respect and open communication. This principle also applies to situations where the CBCAP director is a staff member in a larger system and the board is appointed independently.

2. **Mission Driven:** Acknowledge that the mission, vision and core value of preventing child abuse and neglect are critical pieces that help build common ground and a basis for shared decision-making.

3. **Strategic Thinking:** It is important to ensure ongoing assessment, thinking and engagement focuses the agency’s direction strategically to make the best use of resources directed toward preventing child abuse and neglect, to build strategic partnerships and to give guidance to daily management decisions.

4. **Culture of Inquiry:** Institutionalize a culture of inquiry, mutual respect, and constructive debate that leads to sound and shared decision-making.

5. **Independent-Mindedness:** Exceptional boards are independent-minded and put the interest of the agency above all else when making decisions. Even when boards are advisory rather than governing, they can be powerful advocates for prevention in the larger systems in which they are based.

6. **Ethos of Transparency:** Promote a culture of transparency by ensuring that donors, stakeholders, board members, the public, the state legislature and all interested others have access to appropriate and accurate information about the agency.

7. **Compliance with Integrity:** Promote strong ethical values, disciplined compliance and mechanisms for active oversight that ensure accountability and reduce risk. Board members should be aware of the commitments of CBCAP State Lead Agencies and support the agency in fulfilling those commitments, along with any others that apply to the agency.

8. **Sustaining Resources:** Link bold visions and plans to the financial resources and other supports (including infrastructure and internal capacity) the agency needs to realistically succeed.

9. **Results-Oriented:** Exceptional boards are results oriented and judge the agency’s progress based on efficiency, effectiveness, impact and quality.

10. **Intentional Board Practices:** Boards purposefully structure themselves to fulfill their duties and support agency priorities, structures and practices that adapt to changing circumstances.

11. **Continuous Learning:** The board is a continuous learning system, evaluating its performance and value and embedding learning opportunities in and outside the boardroom.

12. **Revitalization:** Exceptional boards energize themselves through planned turnover, thoughtful recruitment and inclusiveness. They value the importance of diverse, fresh perspectives. Source: Twelve Principles of Governance That Empower Exceptional Boards, Washington, DC, Board Source 2005. For more information or to order a copy of the complete book, visit www.boardsource.org.

**Key Supports for Board Members**

Since CBCAP State Lead Agencies benefit from dynamic boards, it is important to ensure ongoing supports to help board members fulfill their vital roles. Some of these supports include:

- **Role Descriptions for Board Members:** When Board members have written descriptions of their roles and responsibilities they will have a better understanding of what they are agreeing to and the opportunities for them to contribute. Ideally, potential board members should review this document prior to committing to serve on the board. In situations where CBCAP State Lead Agency board members are appointed based on their other roles...
and responsibilities, this document can serve as a basis for discussion regarding how they can best meet the needs of the agency.

- **Commitment Agreement**: An agreement that is given to all new and potential board members which clearly delineates the expectations of their elected or appointed roles. This may include the mission and purpose of the agency, meeting requirements and frequency, participation and fundraising and/or donor expectations.

- **Conflict of Interest Policies**: Policies to prevent the personal interests of staff, officers and members of the board from interfering with the performance of their duties and to prevent personal, financial, professional or political gains from their role, or even the appearance of such gain.

- **Orientations for New Board Members**: Board members can contribute best when they are well informed and know the context and background of the discussions and decisions taking place, when they understand the systems in which the agency operates and the levels of decision-making open to them and to others, and when they understand the broader context of child abuse prevention and the importance of their work.

- **On-going Training for Board Members**: Board members will benefit from increased knowledge regarding the agency, the programs funded, the populations served, emerging issues related to the child abuse and neglect prevention field and state and national statistics and trends. Staff in CBCAP State Lead Agencies can provide this training on a regular basis. Board members may be better able to articulate the work of the agency if they know more about the individuals whose lives are helped by the work of the agency. It can be helpful to periodically arrange visits to funded programs or to invite staff and parents from funded programs to present information regarding their work and the importance of the CBCAP State Lead Agency’s support.

- **Board Evaluations**: Boards need to regularly evaluate their own performance—either through a self-assessment or with the aid of an outside party. There are numerous tools designed to collect feedback on the board’s performance. Some are divided into three parts: culture of the board, responsibilities of individual board members and responsibilities of the Board as a whole. Local United Way Agencies usually offer support for board development and evaluation and other resources are listed at the end of this document.

- **Annual Strategic Planning/Thinking Process**: A proactive process that supports the board and staff in assessing the current status of the agency’s work, gathering broader views of the status of the field of work in the state and nationally and designing plans for creating the results the agency is seeking—prevention of child abuse and neglect. Given that there are numerous paths for achieving this goal and the need to work on multiple levels—individual, relationships, community and society—it is important to have an overall guiding model from which to work. Board members are important co-developers of this guiding framework.

- **Process for Engaging the Board**: It can be valuable to check in with board members at the beginning and end of each meeting to see if they have questions, comments or other items to share. Ideally, after each meeting, every board member should be able to positively answer three questions: **What did I learn? What purpose did I serve? Was my time used productively?** This can help ensure stronger commitment and more active participation and can help build a sense of inclusion.

- **Catalog of Board Strengths and Assets**: Board members bring tremendous resources to State Lead Agencies and can often open doors to other opportunities. Sometimes, the gifts of board members may go unrecognized by the agency and the member may not recognize key opportunities to contribute. It is a valuable exercise to conduct an annual inventory of board strengths, skills, relationships, and other
areas of support to help determine the assets board members bring individually and collectively. The inventory can also focus on how the member would like to engage with the agency and how to best make contributions.

**Partnering with Parents as Board Members**

Parent representation on any CBCAP board helps to ensure that the perspectives of families that are being served by CBCAP programs are helping to guide how resources are applied and that the work of the organization is cohesive with the emerging needs of families. To promote successful partnerships with parents as board members, boards can consider the benefits they hope to gain, the resources and supports needed and the commitment of staff and other board members.

It is useful for CBCAP State Lead Agencies to devote time to specifically explore the benefits and challenges of including parents in their governance structure. If organizations already have parents on their board, it is important to avoid overworking one or two parent representatives. Historically, CBCAP organizations have made significant gains in facilitating parent voices at the programmatic level. Parents who have been effective partners at the program level may have potential to serve on the State Lead Agency board. Building a career ladder to integrate parents into the board’s committee structure or establishing a Parent Advisory Board or task group has been effective ways of facilitating skilled parent leadership at the board level. This additional effort to reach out to and recruit parents as board members has often led to positive results. Parents who are board members can be effective spokespersons, powerful advocates and strong supporters. Some of the many benefits CBCAP State Lead Agencies may expect to gain from recruiting parents as board members include:

- First hand knowledge of how CBCAP programs are benefiting families and where improvements can be made
- Learning more about the ‘human face’ of the families involved in the prevention programs funded
- A better understanding of respectful, effective and efficient service delivery
- Increased attention by policy makers
- Shared responsibility and knowledge building
- The creation of a larger advocacy base for prevention
- Policy change at the programmatic as well as legislative level
- More community recognition of the work of the CBCAP organizations
- A deeper appreciation for a system that is inclusive and relevant to all cultures of their community

True respect embodies reciprocity and the hope is that board members who give so much to the agency, also gain some benefits. It is important to stress the benefits of participation, not only for parents but for all board members. Some of these are:

- A broader work experience
- A sense of contributing to the community
- Opportunities to create meaningful change in areas board members feel passionate about
- Opportunities to network with others doing the same kind of work
- Opening more doors for employment and personal references
- Creating more avenues for important knowledge to reach diverse communities
- Exposure to high levels of knowledge and training
- Having a sense of belonging
- Modeling for your own and other families that everyone has the power to make a difference
- Opportunities to lead, share and have others appreciate contributions.
Supports for Parent Board Members

In addition to exploring the benefits of partnering with parents as board members, CBCAP State Lead Agencies should set clear guidelines for the types of supports that will be available to ensure parents can participate fully in board activities. For example, parent board members are frequently the only members of the board whose attendance may constitute a financial burden. Many seasoned parent leaders are already volunteering time in their own community in addition to holding a regular job during the day. Although parent representation from program constituency may be the ultimate desire; class, education, communication and cultural barriers often arise if a supportive structure is not in place ahead of time. There are creative ways of overcoming these types of barriers in addition to the obvious necessity of providing remuneration for lost wages, child care and transportation.

As with any change in group composition, there will be a need for the board to revisit team building. Strategies for team building among board members include:

- Taking a little time at every board meeting for less formal warm-ups to include sharing non work related stories,
- Expressing the importance of parent voices in the process during and after a meeting, joint training opportunities,
- Having a designated staff person that is a point of contact and will take the time to build a personal relationship with parent board members,
- Having more than one parent representative on the board, co-chairing positions with parents.

Inclusive boards may also interact in some of the following ways:

- Sharing a meal together, particularly foods from different cultures
- Dressing in a more relaxed style during meetings
- Providing the use of a computer to those with limited computer access
- Maintaining contact by telephone, especially in the beginning
- Having an orientation ahead of time and include the background of the current board members and their formal and informal roles
- Allowing potential parent board members to audit a board meeting before committing to become a board member
- Having diversity reflected in the composition of the entire board
- Providing an appendix of frequently used terminology and acronyms
- Having parents take on some of the facilitation or presentation roles
- Respecting different communication styles as well as allowing time for all board members to contribute
- Allowing for diverse methods of discussion and decision making as well as conventional methods
- Striving for consensus rather than strictly adhering to a majority rules vote when the decision will require the support and involvement of all board members.

Other considerations are the length, frequency, time and location of meetings; any expected monetary membership contribution that is unaffordable; and the challenge of paying out-of-pocket costs of meetings and activities, even when there is an anticipated reimbursement.

There are many considerations when partnering with parents as board members. CBCAP State Lead Agencies are strongly encouraged to work with parents to discover and resolve any barriers and to be thoughtful about the tremendous benefits of working together. FRIENDS National Resource Center offers training and support to State Lead Agency staff and parent leaders to help ensure strong partnerships for working together. For further information, please ask your FRIENDS T/TA Coordinator about these opportunities.
In Summary

Many volumes have been written about effective boards. This document is a short summary of key points. If you would like more information, be sure to get in touch with your FRIENDS T/TA Coordinator. In addition, there are some resources listed below that may be of help. This is an important topic and one that can bring significant strength to CBCAP State Lead Agencies.

Useful Internet Resources

2004 Governance Index, BoardSource, www.boardsource.org. Survey results of more than 900 chief executives and board members that address nonprofit practices such as board size, composition, practices, committees, etc.

Best Practices for Executive Directors and Boards of Nonprofit Organizations, Whatcom Council of Nonprofits, 2000 www.wcnwebsite.org. This is an excellent resource. These best practices cover nine areas of competency identified as critical for success. Each best practice identified also has suggestions for achieving that competency.

BoardSource, www.boardsource.org, formerly the National Center for Nonprofit Boards, is dedicated to increasing the effectiveness of nonprofit organizations by strengthening boards of directors. They offer a variety of resources and tools.

Learning from Sarbanes-Oxley: a Checklist for Charities and Foundations, Independent Sector, Washington, DC, www.IndependentSector.org. BoardSource and Independent Sector have created recommendations on how charities and foundations can voluntarily incorporate certain provisions of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act into their operations. Recommendations range from conflicts of interest, audits, etc. A full report is also available on this site.

McNamara, Carter Authenticity Consulting, Free Complete Toolkit for Boards, 1997-2006, http://www.managementhelp.org/boards/boards.htm. Excellent resource for both nonprofit and for-profit boards. Covers a range of topics such as roles and responsibilities, operations, staffing, governance, human resources.

Principles & Practices for Nonprofit Excellence, Minnesota Council of Nonprofits (MCN), 2005, www.mncn.org. This is a guide for nonprofit board members, managers and staff. Document covers nine critical areas with symbols for legal or required areas and other identifiers for highly recommended areas. MCN’s web site also provides templates and samples and techniques to help organizations implement the principles and practices.