

HOW CAN COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY BOARDS TRANSFORM CLIMATE GOVERNANCE?

A **community accountability board (CAB)** is a community-led government board that ensures equitable, transparent, and responsive policies serve frontline communities' needs. They empower local voices and foster collaboration between community members and governments. CABs are designed to support your community's priorities, particularly in addressing the impacts of climate change and pollution from buildings.

What does it take to start a CAB?



Community Governance

- **Important features:** CABs must reflect your diverse community (age, race, economic status, neighborhood/ location) and prioritize the lived experiences of frontline communities.
- **Possible challenges:** Selecting board members and defining their roles and responsibilities can be hard. Community groups will have different interests and perspectives. Ensuring fair representation across diverse community stakeholders can be a complex and ongoing process.



Capacity Building

- **Important features:** Training, resources, and money for CAB members are important to ensure effective participation and prevent burnout.
- **Possible challenges:** Funding for staffing, training, research, and community engagement initiatives may be limited. Insufficient resources can hinder the board's ability to conduct thorough investigations, provide meaningful oversight, engage with the community, and hold entities accountable.



Legal Framework

- **Important features:** CABs must operate within city and state laws, with clear delegation of authority and transparency requirements.
- **Possible challenges:** Even a straightforward legal process for establishing a CAB can still be challenging when there are significant political and power barriers. Individuals and entities may attempt to sway the decisions or actions of the board, either overtly or covertly, to protect their own interests.



Transparency and Accountability

- **Important features:** Regular public reporting, open meetings, and community feedback mechanisms are critical for maintaining trust.
- **Possible challenges:** Engaging community members in decision-making processes and fostering meaningful dialogue takes time. Deliberations within the board, community consultations, and the need to reach consensus on important matters can be time-consuming.





Authority and Empowerment

- **Important features:** CABs should have decision-making power to influence policies, allocate resources, and enforce standards, particularly around building performance and decarbonization.
- **Possible challenges:** If the board's decisions or recommendations lack legal enforceability, entities being held accountable may choose to ignore or contest them, rendering the board's power ineffective.

Why should my community start a CAB?

Community-based decision-making processes are priorities for policymaking that serves all residents. Currently, frontline communities bear the brunt of economic inequities, and live with devastating environmental impacts on their health and infrastructure. The only way to remedy this situation is to include these residents in future regulatory and policy decisions. CABs can play a pivotal role in driving continuous

improvement in building standards, reducing carbon emissions, and enhancing overall community resilience. The biggest question for governments and elected officials is how willing they are to defer to community ownership. To pivot toward justice and environmental health, our systems must shift influence and authority from more traditional power holders to residents.

Where do CAB's exist now?



There are a handful of places that have CAB-like structures including Boston, Seattle, and Evanston, IL. Let's take a look at the key features of **Boston's Review Board** as an example.

Boston's CAB was created as part of the City's building performance standard (Building Emissions Reduction and Disclosure Ordinance, or BERDO). The Board is given authority to enforce BERDO's requirements and therefore monitors progress and compliance with the goals of the policy. The Board also delivers important decisions on grants from the City's Equitable Emissions Investment Fund and whether buildings are granted flexibility based on special circumstances.

The Board is made up of nine appointed members: six from a community-based organization, two open nominations, and one reserved for the Chair of the Boston City Council's Environmental Justice, Resiliency, and Parks Committee. This structure emphasizes community representation, lived-experience expertise, and environmental justice values.

How do we set up a CAB?

1

Pre-engagement planning: Outline the objectives, structure, and functions of the CAB.

Community Considerations:

- Advocate for inclusive policies that ensure the CAB has the necessary authority and mandate to address community issues effectively.
- Build coalitions with other community groups to strengthen the advocacy efforts for a CAB that truly represents diverse community interests.

Government Considerations

- Allocate necessary resources, such as funding and staff, to support the establishment and ongoing operation of the CAB.
- Ensure that all relevant government departments and agencies are informed about the CAB initiative and are engaged in the process. This includes planning joint activities and sharing responsibilities for different aspects of the CAB's setup.

2

Documentation & Formal Proposals: Develop comprehensive documentation that includes the CAB's bylaws, vision, purpose, principles, and member roles.

Community Considerations:

- Actively participate in the review process of CAB documentation to ensure community interests are adequately protected and promoted.
- Lobby elected officials and departmental leaders and other key decision makers to support adoption of the CAB proposal with the recommended community-centric amendments.

Government Considerations

- Manage the process of obtaining approvals from necessary governmental bodies, such as city councils or mayoral offices. This includes scheduling hearings, managing submissions, and facilitating deliberations for governance structure and/or community representation.

3

Public Engagement and Feedback: Publicly announce the proposal for the CAB and provide access to all relevant documents in accordance with the locality's language access policy. Adjust the CAB proposal based on public feedback to ensure community needs and concerns are addressed.

Community Considerations:

- Organize and host community forums to educate and mobilize community members about the CAB's potential impacts and benefits.
- Push for improvements in how the public can provide feedback, such as online platforms, language accessibility, and accommodating different schedules.

Government Considerations

- Arrange and conduct public hearings to collect community input, making sure to accommodate different schedules, provide relevant translation, document all feedback and respond to public concerns.

4

Implementation & Operational Setup: Formally establish the CAB through the signing of its bylaws, governance structure and/or rules of procedures by appropriate city officials. Assign a specific governmental agency or agencies to liaison with the CAB.

Community Considerations:

- Identify and nominate people with a strong desire to represent the interests of front line community members to serve on the CAB.
- Establish and promote mechanisms for continuous community feedback to the CAB, ensuring it remains responsive and accountable to the community's needs.

Government Considerations

- Oversee the formal establishment of the CAB, including the signing of its establishment charter and the public announcement of its activation. This is likely to be achieved through ordinances, regulations, and policies.

Ready to start? Explore the [full toolkit](#) and learn more about community-led policymaking.

"Transforming Climate Governance With Community Accountability Boards: A Toolkit for Co-Creating Equitable Building Decarbonization Solution" by Julianna Di Lauro, Rajiv Ravulapati, Alexes Holguin Juarez, and James Burton comes from a series of working sessions between IMT and the participants of our CAB cohort: [Alternatives for Community and Environment](#); [Grassroots Impact](#); [People for Community Recovery](#); [POWER Philadelphia](#); [Strategic Actions for a Just Economy](#); [Verde](#); [Public Health Law Center](#); and government departments in Kansas City, MO; Los Angeles, CA; New Orleans, LA; Orlando, FL; Portland, OR; Philadelphia, PA.