



Best Practices for Local Governance Boards for Building Energy Upgrade Programs

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Executive Summary

Establishing local governance boards (LGBs) can help building energy upgrade program administrators and other decision-makers inform, shape, and strengthen their programs. Local governance boards are made up of community members who convene with program decision-makers to help shape decisions regarding locally-identified problems and solutions.

When created intentionally and thoughtfully, LGBs can help teams foster programs that center the needs, voices, and expertise of community members who typically are not included in decision making. However, LGBs can also be created in ways that do not meaningfully incorporate local expertise or seek to include locally-identified solutions to increase investment and participation in building energy upgrade programs (or similar programs).

This resource presents key considerations and guidance for creating robust LGBs, including ways for these groups to go beyond having a solely advisory role, to instead co-govern decisions around programs. Key phases of developing an LGB include **formation, operation, and maintenance**. This best practice guide will address how program decision-makers can approach each phase to create effective LGBs and ensure they function optimally.

Residential Retrofits for Energy Equity (R2E2) provides deep technical assistance to state, local, and tribal governments as well as community-based organizations to jumpstart energy upgrades for single family and multifamily affordable housing, especially in frontline communities. R2E2 is a partnership of the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy (ACEEE), Elevate, Emerald Cities Collaborative, and HR&A Advisors.

Overview of local governance in building energy upgrade programs

Broadly speaking, governance can be understood as “the *process* of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented)” (UN 2009).¹ A local governance board (LGB)—a group of stakeholders responsible for carrying out the governance process—can take many forms, including advisory boards, task forces, commissions, and committees, each of which assumes specific types of functions and interacts with decision-makers in various ways. While these types of groups differ in many ways, a common thread is that they are often composed of community members and other stakeholders from relevant sectors, geographies, and backgrounds who have been selected to help shape and inform solutions to local problems.

What is meant by “governance”?

Governance is “the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented)” (UN 2009).

A local governance board is an important tool for collaborative co-governance with traditional decision-makers.² LGBs can actively deepen democratic practices and signal to community members that they are experts in their local context, and as such, should be given meaningful authority over decisions that affect their day-to-day lives (Chap et al. 2023).³ While LGBs can be an effective way for program administrators and local communities to co-design and implement effective solutions from the perspective of community members, LGBs can also be structured in a way that is merely perfunctory. However, in their most robust form, LGBs can go that extra step to help ensure that community members play a central role in decision making for the programs, projects, and policies that directly affect them. Creating a successful LGB requires deliberate relationship building, conflict resolution, changes in decision-making processes, time, flexibility, humility, and much more. Program administrators who partner with community-based

¹ Circumstances where local governance boards are involved with local governments in a formal capacity can be subject to local laws and regulations, the application of which is beyond the scope of this document. See [iBabs B.V \(2022\)](#) and [Upshaw \(2006\)](#) for more on local governance boards and how they can work with local governments to represent communities in decision making. See [AIGI \(ND\)](#) for more perspectives on effective governance and considerations for group organization

² Co-governance refers to “a collection of participatory models and practices in which government and community members work together through formal and informal structures to make collective policy decisions, co-create programs to meet local needs, and make sure those policies and programs are implemented effectively (Chap, Chin, Farrow et. al. 2023).” Appendix B provides further detail and comparisons across several types of locally centered governance structures.

³ When considering governance of a program, it is critical to contemplate the actors involved in decision making, how these decisions will be implemented, as well as the structures that allow a group to arrive at and implement decisions ([UN 2009](#)).

organizations and other partners will find that these partnerships can help ensure more thoughtful, creative, and locally appropriate decisions regarding the formation, operations, and maintenance of LGBs.

This document provides guidance and best practices to launch LGBs. We also outline strategies for achieving more robust LGBs that serve as pathways for programs to begin deferring to community members on solutions. The recommendations found throughout this document were compiled using research on best practices, feedback from R2E2 experts, input from entities experienced with using local governance boards, including the City of San Francisco and Green and Healthy Home Initiative (GHHI), as well as reviews of existing local governance boards and their practices. At the end of this document is a list of local governance boards that were used as models to inform these recommendations, as well as resources to help guide specific aspects and phases of the development of LGBs.

Many different types of communities and community members may be involved in local governance boards, as outlined in the figure below.

Figure 1. Examples of communities and community members that may be involved in LGBs



The list of types of stakeholders to recruit might also include past participants of programs, past project partners, policymakers, affected groups, decision-makers, energy efficiency advocates, etc. Program administrators should consider their program goals and understand the local context through various perspectives in order to identify additional stakeholders that would be valuable to include in the formation of a local governance group.

Considerations for forming and scoping an LGB

As with any community engagement effort, it is best for teams to consider their specific context to determine if an LGB is the ideal way to achieve their stakeholder engagement goals.

LGBs are not a replacement for ongoing community engagement that can reach other community members not represented in an LGB. No matter how robust or representative an LGB might seem, it is not possible to represent all community perspectives through an LGB. It is recommended that LGBs be created in addition to, not in lieu of, other forms of community engagement.

Program administrators should be mindful of their own capacity and that of their partners and potential board members. LGBs can require significant time and coordination, especially when including stakeholders who have not previously been involved in program decision making. Program administrators will need to take the lead in preparing materials or educational sessions in cases where significant level setting is necessary to engage prospective local board members.⁴

Questions to ask your team

The Urban Institute has published a document [outlining several considerations and key questions](#) to ask when thinking through the creation of a community advisory board, which is one of many types of LGBs. This resource provides worksheets to help work through these key considerations. It also includes case studies of successful community advisory boards. We recommend reviewing these seven considerations and the highlighted case studies to help think through your LGB development stages and launch.

⁴ While it is possible in some cases to generate ideas or materials in real time with LGB members, these processes may take capacity building and time to achieve depending on the composition of the group, familiarity with the topic, and experience with community-driven processes.

Prior to forming an LGB, teams may consider such questions as:

- What have we learned about local needs, priorities, and/or wants through our community engagement so far? Can a local board help inform the design (and/or implementation) of our community engagement plans to reach other affected groups?
- Have there been barriers that prevented communities from participating in groups like this in the past, and what were they? Can we compensate community members that have been excluded from decision making because of these barriers? Can we compensate community members for other types of engagement?⁵
- Have we explored alternative structures for community participation in decision making, governance, and accountability (e.g., paid partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs) where CBOs have decision-making power)?
- How will an LGB complement our existing community engagement plans?
- Do we have the organizational capacity to commit to meeting and discussing topics with LGB members on an ongoing basis? Do we have funds for compensating additional partners or facilitators for their time?

Examples of decision-making and co-governing structures with local leadership

While not exhaustive, Table 1 outlines local governance board models with different decision-making structures. A key characteristic these models share is that they can be set up for effective co-governance with traditional decision-makers. Detailed descriptions of each model are included in Appendix B, which outlines how the design, member composition, roles, and purpose of a group influence decision making and power within a program.

⁵ We recommend compensating CBOs, residents, and individual community members for their time and expertise much like a consultant would be compensated. Teams should consider whether stakeholders such as non-profit housing executives or lenders truly need financial compensation to participate.

Table 1. Examples of local governance board models

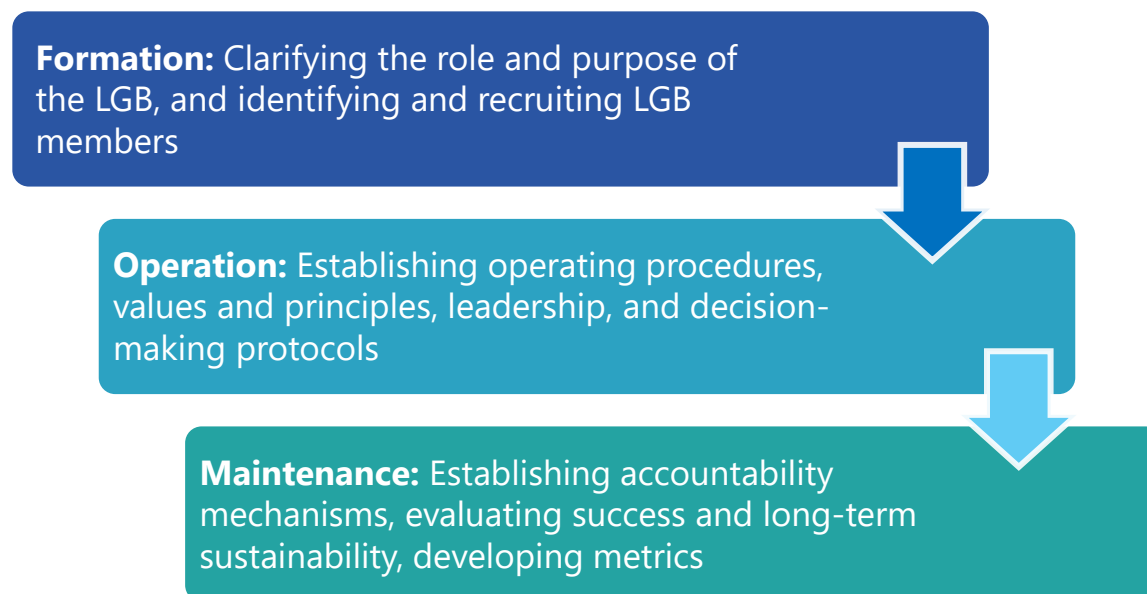
Model	What is it? ⁶
Community advisory board	Body composed of community members (such as residents or small businesses) who share similar characteristic(s) or experience(s) with local expertise that convene to contribute local voices to a program or project (Arnos et al. 2021). These groups have often been used for research purposes, to inform the design of pilots or programs.
Steering committee	A “group comprised of cross-sector local partners representative of the relevant ecosystem that provides strategic direction” for programs (Collective Impact Forum, 2014). Could include seats for community members or residents.
Circles	Small groups linked to and related to one another that have a defined purpose and full decision-making authority in a specific domain of the program.
Local resource group	Group composed of individuals with common interests or backgrounds in an open forum and open membership fashion.
People’s assembly	People’s assemblies offer consistent spaces and opportunities “where community members come together, name the challenges they are facing, and together imagine solutions (Chap, Chin, Farrow et. al. 2023).” These are often large gatherings where community members can discuss and generate ideas for effective local solutions and often include some political education. Meetings occur frequently and build organizing and co-governance experience.

Local governance board development steps

Teams should consider three primary stages to form an LGB: formation, operation, and maintenance. Program administrators and their partners should align on several topics related to each stage, as shown in figure 2, before identifying prospective board members and convening the board.

⁶ Note: People may use many different names to describe similar structures. Detailed descriptions of each of these models are included in Appendix B.

Figure 2. The stages of local governance board development, adapted from Newman et al. (2011)



To put these stages into perspective and illustrate what they look like in practice, Newman et al. (2011) present process best practices and examples of case studies for each stage of local governance board development, with community advisory boards as the primary focus. The graphic above and some of the following frameworks, including the general process of launching a local board (starting with formation and moving toward maintenance), have been adapted from Newman et al. (2011).

Collaborative non-linear course

Many of the steps outlined in the following sections require a collaborative and iterative approach, involving ongoing dialogue, feedback, and refinement between the program team and the local board, so the process doesn't always follow a set sequence of steps. For example, teams may need to revisit and refine the group's vision statement with the board once it's formed, which results in multiple drafts that can impact the group's direction. The process of co-governance is often non-linear. This type of collaboration can lead to effective co-creation and co-governance in practice.

Formation

The formation phase encompasses the planning and preparatory steps necessary to set a local governance board up for success. In this section, we offer guidance for steps such as confirming the board's vision and purpose, clarifying roles, and selecting board members.

Confirm vision and purpose for the local governance board

Invite the organizational partners on your team, including all CBO partners, to work together to establish a vision for the LGB.⁷ To start, consider asking: "What are we working toward, and how can an LGB help us meet this vision?" After the discussion, draft a vision statement. It can be broad in scope and time horizon. For example:

- "Our team's vision is that all low-income households in County X can thrive in place with reliable power and energy upgrades. County X's low-income households have a direct say in shaping programs that affect them."

A shared document containing the vision statement and other agreements can help the program administrator, partners, and the LGB stay on course. Consider revisiting or updating the vision statement periodically, particularly during significant changes, such as the addition of new team members or modifications to the program.

Determine the decision-making power

Program administrators and partners should clarify the board's role in decision making before recruiting members. Program administrators need to communicate clearly with board members about where and with whom decision-making authority exists and how feedback and recommendations will be used.

It is critical for program administrators to be clear about the differences between "advisors" and "partners" in an LGB, given that each operates with distinct levels of power (Newman et al. 2011). An LGB is considered to be a **partner** when it *collaborates* on decisions impacting its members, while an LGB that is an **advisor** *provides input that can be accepted or rejected* by the program administrator or other decision-makers.

The program administrator and key related decision-makers can consider questions such as:

- Will the LGB be acting as a partner and have joint decision-making power with the program administrator and others? How will we remain accountable to the board for these decisions?

⁷ Also consider including organizations or partners that have roles and relationships with those your program intends to collaborate with or serve.

- Will the LGB provide advice, with the program administrator and other decision-makers having final say over whether the advice will be implemented?
- If we are not in a position to endow the board with decision-making power, how can we get there, and what is needed to build this capacity from an engagement and institutional perspective?

As program administrators start to think about how the LGB can play a role in decision making, they and their partners should reflect on their experience with community engagement as a pathway to redistribute power from organizations to community members. Program administrators may vary in their experience with community engagement. The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership (Facilitating Power 2021) articulates distinct levels of community engagement, ranging from marginalization at the lowest level to deference to communities as the highest level of engagement. It emphasizes that there are differences in impact depending on the type of engagement. For example, engagement that serves to inform (i.e., a presentation) is less impactful than engagement that fosters democratic participation in community-driven decision making (i.e., certain types of LGBs or participatory budgeting). In addition to articulating impact, the spectrum can be used as an assessment or planning tool to help programs reach deeper levels of community engagement. Program administrators can use this tool to analyze their position on the spectrum and build capacity to move toward more impactful levels of engagement, which include a pathway to decision making.

Clarify roles among the program administrator and partners

The program administrator may need to clarify roles among the program administrator staff and partner organizations before understanding their relationship with the LGB. For example, consider essential roles that would be most appropriate for program administration staff to take on when working with the LGB, such as who will be responsible for maintaining communication channels with the LGB members and how or if CBO partners would like to be involved with the LGB. Clarity around roles and responsibilities between the program administrator and partners will help build an effective group infrastructure and foster trust, accountability, and transparency before and during engagement with LGB members.

Tools such as the [DARCI accountability grid](#) can help determine or start conversations around roles, sometimes including roles around decision making (e.g., whether the program administrator or a CBO partner will serve as the facilitator). An example DARCI matrix is included at the end of this document.⁸

⁸ An alternative to DARCI teams may consider using is MOCHA (Manager, Owner, Consulted, Helper, Approver). A link to this resource is included in the references section of this document.

To further clarify the responsibilities of organizational or partner staff, consider questions like

- Which team members have experience, skills, interest, and capacity to provide facilitation, leadership development, conflict resolution, and other services that factor into the success of the LGB?
- Which of our partner organizations and program staff have a track record of building trust with community members?
- Which organizations are best suited to carry out administrative tasks (such as delivering stipends), secure meeting spaces, administer the technology for virtual or hybrid meetings, and manage other key logistics?
- If there are gaps in capacity or resources, what steps are needed to close those gaps? Are there opportunities for additional training or peer learning to equip program staff and partners with the skills they need to succeed?

Determine the local governance board's scope, purpose, and structure

Consider questions such as⁹

- Which parts of this issue or program would we like to discuss with people who have local expertise?
- Will the LGB be active during both the design and implementation of our program?
- Do we need to build the capacity of community members to participate? Would they benefit from training or workshops on certain topics?
- What benefits could the creation of an LGB provide to the broader community?
- Do our local partners have experience with community-led decision making for a project or program? If so, what can we learn from them?

While the conveners of the LGB may draft an initial vision statement and scope, it is best practice to kick off the LGB by identifying members' priorities and providing the opportunity to further refine the vision, scope, and purpose together. When possible, it is best practice to build enough space, staff capacity, and resources into the collaboration timeline to explore additional priorities and strategies that exceed the initial scope of the LGB (e.g., community members express an interest in flood-proofing homes, but this was not initially anticipated to be part of the building energy upgrade program).

⁹ Program administrators and partners should update their answers to these questions based on feedback from the board once it is formed.

Collaborative decision-making tools

Reaching agreement on important decisions regarding board functions can be challenging. Gradients of agreement are a technique that allows for collective decision making along a spectrum of agreement. It enables stakeholders to revisit decisions in the event of disagreements or tension, making room for open conversations about these differences. Gradients of agreement can help mitigate uneven power dynamics in a group, as everyone is able to voice and have their unique perspective or stance on a given decision heard. This approach works well with smaller groups that have some preexisting trust and values alignment.

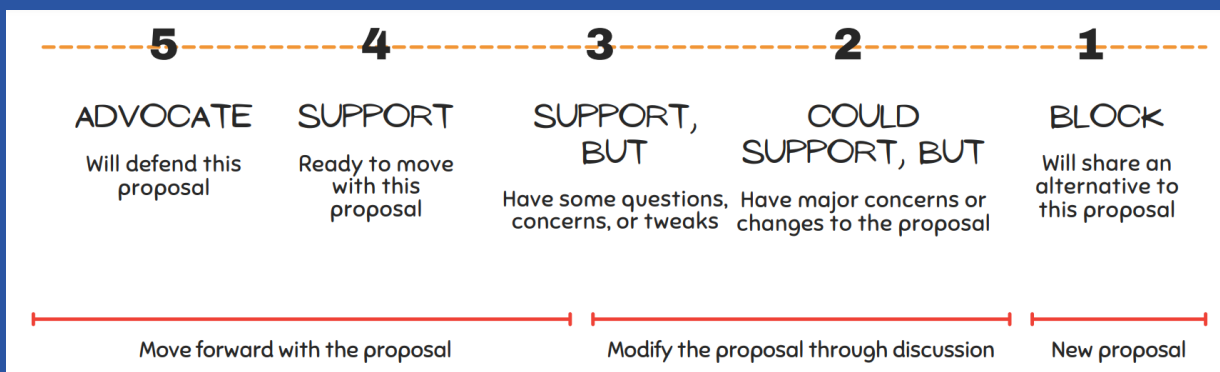


Fig 3. Source: Gradients of agreement spectrum tools for facilitating alignment, Facilitating Power

An alternative approach is consent decision making. Instead of striving to align personal preferences, this approach focuses on ensuring that there are no significant objections to a proposal (Rau 2022). This subtle shift can help prevent frustration or burnout from extended discussion that may be required to reach consensus. Consent is achieved when no one in the group identifies a risk that the group cannot afford to take.

Intentionally craft LGB member responsibilities and expectations

Clear responsibilities need to be deliberately crafted based on the group's purpose and would ideally be refined and finalized with the LGB members.

Use precise language when drafting the board's responsibilities. Community members may be dissuaded from participating if the responsibilities appear to exceed their capacity. It is essential to recognize that community members are experts on areas where they live, work, and recreate, and to emphasize their importance to the program.

Possible responsibilities may include

- Offering constructive solutions and ideas in service of a desired outcome.
- Providing input on how well programs are serving communities, on metrics for success, and on how well local expertise is being used to improve programs.
- Offering insight into lived experience, if LGB members themselves participate or have participated in program offerings.
- Offering insights into unexpected issues and problems arising from the program.
- Developing ideas to address gaps and make program outcomes useful and accessible to the broader community not yet involved in the project.
- Taking an implementation role, for example, in the broader community engagement process (such as event planning, speaking roles, peer-to-peer education, and recruitment of potential participants in the upgrade program).
- Providing input on risk mitigation ideas and strategies proposed by the program administration team.¹⁰
- Participating in a collaborative/participatory budgeting process. Refer to [“Participatory Budgeting”](#) from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for a definition and list of related resources.

It is best practice for teams to think through and determine meeting facilitation and note-taking duties, which could include rotating notetaking roles, a permanent notetaker, or professional facilitation support. Administrative duties could be assigned to program staff to reduce the administrative and logistical burdens on board members, allowing them to focus on the aspects of their work where their expertise is most critical.

See How to Embed [Clear Roles and Responsibilities across Your Collective Impact Governance](#) (Collective Impact Forum 2014) for further guidance and considerations in establishing clear roles and responsibilities.

¹⁰ By risk mitigation, we mean identifying potential harms resulting from the program offerings both to the broader community and those who may participate in the program. For example, the installation of electrification measures may have negative consequences if no proactive ways to mitigate these risks are considered (e.g., higher energy bills, displacement during construction). Creating a risk mitigation plan is complex and therefore may not be an appropriate or reasonable task for the LGB members to take up themselves.

Recruit and select board members

Creating clear LGB member selection criteria can help ensure that the membership accurately reflects the program's goals and includes the desired experience or expertise. Consider characteristics that would enable the board to function effectively, such as a willingness to share honest perspectives and respect differing opinions.

Consider doing a stakeholder analysis or ecosystems mapping activity to identify the key actors to include in an LGB.¹¹ Local partners—who themselves can be valuable LGB members and/or facilitators—may be able to help identify local leaders who would be interested in participating. Table 2 describes two options for recruiting members.

Table 2. Recruitment opportunities and considerations

Recruitment options	Description	Considerations
Referral or nomination by a community-based partner	Local partners invite community members to join. This might lead to easier establishment of trust and make it possible to convene an LGB relatively quickly.	Do you have local partners with the capacity to help with recruitment? Do the local partners have a clear understanding of shared agreements? ¹² What will the local partner communicate to the individual community members to set realistic expectations for participation?
Open enrollment	Membership is open to any local stakeholder interested in participating, and they can apply to join the group. Flyers, door knocking, or short presentations at local events might be used to help recruitment.	What experience or expertise should prospective members have? ¹³ How can we ensure applicants meet important criteria? How do we remove barriers to applying? What is the process for selecting applications and how would program staff (and partners) make selection decisions?

¹¹ A free ecosystem mapping template for visualizing connections among stakeholders and organizations is available from Visible Network Labs: <https://visiblenetworklabs.com/ecosystem-map-template-for-community-collaboration/>.

¹² As described later in this document, agreements drafted by program staff and community-based partners can set the standard for how to work together in a respectful way. Since this is an agreement between the LGB and the program administration team and partners, it can be first drafted by the program team and partners and presented to the prospective LGB members to be refined and agreed upon as the basis for good working relationships.

¹³ Expertise can encompass lived experience, experience with common barriers or challenges, or any other experience that is important for the team to have represented in the LGB.

One-on-one conversations with potential members can help determine whether individuals have the capacity, experience, and ability to voice and respect others' opinions on various matters. This is a best practice to ensure effective membership composition and to start building rapport with board members.

It is a common practice for board member terms to be selected collaboratively by the program administration team and partners. Members could have the option to renew their participation annually by being asked if they have the capacity and interest to continue participating in the board. A process should be established to identify and recruit new members when current members are unable to continue.

Set member expectations

Consider the following questions to set expectations for board members:

- Are members expected to attend every call or meeting? What does active participation look like?
- Are members expected to do any work outside of meeting times?
- Will we ask board members if they have any expectations or norms they would like to develop together?
- How would an individual board member provide feedback on a topic if they are unable to attend a meeting?
- What kinds of procedures do we want in place if board members are not attending meetings or are unable to fulfill their responsibilities?

Expectations need to be explicitly communicated to potential LGB members. When the board is ultimately convened, the conveners should clearly reiterate their understanding of these expectations and address any remaining uncertainties or concerns.

Look ahead to operations: getting ready to work together

Naturally, disagreements, tension, or conflict may arise from LGB activities. Prioritize spending time early on in creating a safe and productive culture for group meetings.

Employing principles of partnership agreements can help prevent one voice from dominating or overshadowing other voices (Community-Campus Partnerships for Health ND). It can facilitate space for representatives from groups that have often been excluded from decision making to share their expertise. Examples can be found in the 'additional resources' section of this document.

Co-creating shared group agreements is an effective way to ensure safe, productive meetings and collaboration (National Equity Project ND). They allow the group to identify what individuals need from one another to create an environment that is open, supportive, and helps build trust between and across teams and the LGB.

Consider co-creating a memorandum of understanding (MOU) or similar document outlining expectations with LGB members. Sample MOU agreements and content are provided at the end of this document.

Resources for working through conflict and tension

Facilitating Power has created a [process outlining suggestions and steps to come to group alignment in the face of opposing viewpoints or tension around decisions](#). **Movement Strategy Center** has also published a [guidebook on conflict resolution](#) with exercises and associated facilitator guidance.

The Institute for Market Transformation has shared its [process guide](#) for navigating conflicts that may arise between various members of a collaborative project team, including community members.

Operations and Maintenance

In this section, we offer guidance on the operations and maintenance phases of a local governance board, with a focus on logistics related to topics such as meeting structure, board member compensation, and metrics for LGB success.

Design effective meeting structures

An experienced external facilitator can aid in group decision making and conflict resolution. If unavailable, team members may need facilitation training. Teams can consider using tools such as the [Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making](#) by Sam Kaner to create participatory learning spaces and effective communication on energy and building upgrade topics. Activities such as icebreakers and feedback exercises that take into account various learning styles and engagement preferences can enhance participation.

Popular education models and principles also enable program staff to communicate more effectively and create pathways for community members, such as residents, to engage with topics that may seem new to them. Popular education principles can be incredibly powerful in building deeply participatory spaces that challenge the “expert paradigm,” in which communities may feel they cannot engage with a topic because they lack the necessary expertise to contribute. Teams are encouraged to read and complete reflection questions in Facilitating Power’s [Popular Education Principles & Practices for a Thriving Culture of Participation](#) to understand how popular education can be integrated into the facilitation of LGB meetings and create participatory learning spaces that highlight the value of lived experience.

It is good practice to task program staff with drafting meeting agendas and discussion topics, especially in the first few meetings. Over time, if a board member has great interest and availability, teams can consider delegating these tasks. Circulate agendas in advance to provide members an opportunity to prepare for discussion and to add or revise agenda items.

Unstructured time during meetings allows members to share information and raise unscheduled topics, building rapport and increasing members’ ownership of the board’s activities. Program-related work time outside of board meetings is best kept to a minimum and communicated in advance.

Depending on the board members’ needs and preferences, staff may need to communicate with them using methods other than email, such as phone calls or texts, to send reminders and keep members informed in the event of a missed meeting.

What is popular education?

In popular education:

“the learning process starts with identifying and describing everyone's own personal experience, and that knowledge is built upon through various activities done in groups. After the activity, a debriefing process allows participants to analyze a shared situation together; seeing links between their own experience and historical and global processes in order to get the ‘big picture’. Through the generation of this new knowledge, participants are able to reflect more profoundly about themselves and how they fit into the world” (The Popular Education News 2005).

This type of process combined with political education is key to developing a shared analysis of local problems and solutions that can lead to systems change.

Encourage LGB member participation from all board members

Branching out beyond large group discussions can help create opportunities for everyone in the room to share their ideas (such as by posting ideas on sticky notes, adding ideas to posters, discussing in breakout groups, or conducting round robins where each person has a turn to speak).

Some program administration teams may consider creating subcommittees or chairs within the LGB for specific topics or decisions. If the groups are small, subcommittees may allow for less outspoken LGB members to voice their opinions on matters important to them.

Agenda templates and examples

Sample meeting agendas suggested for the first six months of meetings have been published by the Collective Impact forum and [can be found here](#). Although these agendas are focused on steering committees, teams may find many of the topics and flow of agendas to be helpful for structuring meetings and conversations with the LGB.

Determine meeting logistics

Consider asking questions about overall timing to sequence meeting topics or agendas:

- At what points in our program timeline is it most important to convene the board to gather input or share a proposed decision and to review the implications of a proposed decision before it is finalized?
- At what points in our timeline is it most important to touch base with the broader local stakeholder ecosystem outside of the LGB?

Virtual options may increase accessibility and availability, but face-to-face meetings allow for building richer, more meaningful relationships. The accessibility of meeting spaces and compensation for travel expenses will need to be considered and agreed upon with program partners.

Consider how notes and agendas will be shared with the group in a format that is accessible to all members and the program administration team. Some community members may prefer for meeting materials to be printed, for example. Some community members may also have limited literacy or may not speak English as their first language.

Determine compensation

It is not uncommon for community members to be invited to provide feedback on program and policy design.¹⁴ This process is generally considered a best practice; however, many communities are often asked for their feedback without considering the time, commitment,

¹⁴ See the guidebook [Why Am I Always Being Researched?](#) for a nuanced discussion of how power dynamics between communities, organizations, and researchers have hindered community-led decision making.

emotional labor, and possible discomfort that come with these types of engagement. Community members and CBOs are experts in their lived experience. In most contexts, experts in their field are compensated for their time and expertise. In this way, LGB members are no different than consultants.

The Urban Institute has provided specific guidance on the process for determining appropriate compensation for individuals serving on local boards (Arnos et al. 2021).

Consider asking:

- At what rate would we hire a consultant to provide critical insights and implementation support?
- Is the compensation being offered to LGB members reflective of their role as local experts and any implementation support that they will carry out?

In addition to compensating members for their time during meetings, assume an additional 1–2 hours of preparation outside of each LGB meeting for reading documents, responding to emails, and scheduling (plus more for traveling to in-person meetings, as relevant). On-site childcare options, meals/snacks, transportation support, or offering stipends to help meet these needs will make meetings more attractive if meetings occur in person. Including food or activities is a great way to provide an engaging, relaxed, and appreciative environment for board members.

Establish transparency and accountability

As a mechanism for deep community engagement, an LGB itself can help ensure the program is responsive to local needs. For example, one of the roles of the LGB can be to evaluate the success of the program and whether the benefits of building upgrades are effectively reaching community members in a transformative way.

If the board provides suggestions and advice in an advisory role rather than a partnership role, teams should establish accountability mechanisms to ensure responsiveness to the board's suggestions (Sierra Club 2020). At a minimum, this could involve identifying and sharing the potential outcomes that are possible from the group's feedback and then reporting back to group members on the actions taken or not taken in response to their feedback.

Failing to incorporate adequate transparency mechanisms for LGB decision making will risk breaking trust with key stakeholders and may lead to difficulties for other programs.

PUSH Buffalo Case Study

People United for Sustainable Housing (PUSH) Buffalo, a non-profit in Buffalo, NY has shared their experience about managing expectations and being transparent with communities about what is and is not possible through a case study describing PUSH Buffalo's Green Development Zone.

Consider asking

- What mechanisms or platforms can we utilize to create a supportive space for LGB members and program partners to express their frustrations or concerns about the Board?
- What happens if we cannot follow through with a recommendation made by the LGB?
- How can we course correct if the group feels we are not using LGB feedback properly?
- What level of detail is appropriate for updates provided to LGB members?
- What materials can/should we share with LGB members to remain transparent (e.g., budget details or proposals, grant application materials)?

Once meetings have been occurring at a regular pace, consider ways to check in with individual LGB members to discuss their experiences with the board, receive feedback on what is going well and what could be improved, and continue building relationships with these individuals. Program administration staff can consider implementing an “open door” policy to encourage members to bring up issues they would rather discuss in a one-on-one conversation, such as questions, concerns, or other topics.

Determine LGB success using metrics

Program administrators can use metrics to evaluate desired outcomes and the success of the LGB. This can help teams articulate progress and identify areas for improvement. Potential metrics to measure the success of LGBs can include

- Engagement levels of the LGB, including information on attendance, topics brought up by LGB members to explore, and the level of participation in discussions by LGB members.
- Group composition: How well the LGB represents the target community and stakeholder groups, how many different types of community members the group brings together (i.e., elders, youth, small business owners, low-income households, BIPOC community members, etc.).
- Decision-making power of the group: How many/what specific LGB recommendations have been implemented by project leaders or decision-makers. How many/what changes were made to programs based on LGB decision making. Where the LGB is at/is heading on the Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership (Facilitating Power 2021).
- Community leadership: Number of community members who become leaders and advocates for energy programs in their communities.

Although metrics can be a helpful way of determining success, it is also possible to embed targeted discussions in meeting agendas that evaluate how well the LGB is meeting its goals or functioning. Surveys or interviews can also help teams evaluate qualitative data and gain a comprehensive view of the LGB's effectiveness and impact.

Conclusion

LGBs can be a powerful vehicle to help teams design and implement building energy upgrade programs. Robust LGBs consider three primary stages of LGB development: **formation, operation, and maintenance**. Each stage must be carefully considered to ensure the LGB functions efficiently and strengthens the program.

LGBs can challenge top-down governance structures, which can lead to conflict or tension. This tension often indicates a move toward meaningful engagement beyond superficial roles for community members. Program staff should consult with CBO partners for insights and relationships to effectively launch an LGB. With intentional design and execution, an LGB can build enduring, trust-filled relationships that extend beyond a single program.

References, resources, and associated descriptions

[Circles \(Sociocracy\)](#)

- A resource that provides detailed information on the use of circles for decision making in a sociocracy (Rau 2022).

[Co-Governing Toward Multiracial Democracy](#)

- This report details how organizations are working in partnership with local governments to build co-governance models to develop and implement solutions to pressing problems in various communities across the U.S. (Chap et al. 2023).

[Community Advisory Boards in Community-Based Participatory Research: A Synthesis of Best Processes](#)

- An article that describes the best ways program administrators can develop, operate, and maintain a community advisory board for local participatory research (Newman et al. 2011).

[Community At Work Publications](#)

- Resources designed to help teams work through collaborative decision making, facilitation, and effective group structures.

[Community Engagement Conflict Resolution Guide](#)

- A guide teams can use to mediate conflict when it arises between community-based organizations and their partners (Di Lauro and Rideout 2023).

[Consent decision making](#)

- An article that introduces consent decision making, provides an overview of how to facilitate this approach, and provides considerations for choosing between various decision-making structures (Rau 2022).

[Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making](#)

- A guide to understanding different approaches to group decision making and how to make these conversations more productive (Kaner 2014).

[Five Steps for Utilities to Foster Authentic Community Engagement](#)

- An article that describes five steps utilities (and other types of organizations) can take to build meaningful relationships and engage with community members on programs that are designed for affected groups (Draklellis et al. 2022).

[From Community Engagement to Ownership Tools for the Field with Case Studies](#)

- A framework that describes the importance and steps to encouraging participation from community members in municipal environmental committees (Facilitating Power, Movement Strategy Center, and the National Association of Climate Resilience Planners ND).

[Gradients of agreement for democratic decision-making](#)

- An article that introduces the gradients of agreement scale (also known as the consensus spectrum) as a method to improve decision-making processes (Love 2021).

[How to Embed Clear Roles and Responsibilities across Your Collective Impact Governance](#)

- A webinar and associated written resources to help program staff embed clear roles and responsibilities for cross-sector collaboration on programs.

[How to Run a People's Assembly](#)

- An outline that describes a people's assembly or popular assembly and how to successfully operate one (Cardiff University ND).

[MOCHA Roles](#)

- A resource that explains how to use MOCHA roles, an alternative to DARCI roles, which teams may consider using for developing clear roles (The Management Center 2021).

[Principles of Partnership](#)

- A guidance document on creating meaningful and sustainable partnerships to see change within communities (Community-Campus Partnerships for Health ND).

[PUSH Buffalo's Green Development Zone: A Model for New Economy Community Development](#)

- A resource in which PUSH Buffalo describes its Green Development Zone, planning process, further programs within the zone, and lessons learned (Hart and Magavern 2017).

[Shared Accountability Framework For Community Implementation of 100% Clean Energy Goals](#)

- A framework to develop goals and sustainable processes to establish and maintain community leadership (Sierra Club 2020).

[The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership](#)

- A guide to the Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership, which outlines varying levels of engagement and describes how to use the tool for planning and goal setting (Facilitating Power 2021).

[Tools and Resources for Project-Based Community Advisory Boards: Community Voice and Power Sharing Guidebook](#)

- A toolkit that provides information and tools to incorporate a local board into a project or program to strengthen community leadership, buy-in, and participation. (Arnos et al. 2021).

[Tools for Facilitating Alignment](#)

- A toolkit that outlines procedures for shared decision making, building consensus, and prioritizing solutions most important to community members (Facilitating Power ND).

[Tools for Steering Committees](#)

- A toolkit that provides tools for standing up steering committees. This tool offers guidance on identifying potential members, creating descriptions of responsibilities, governance structures, and sample agendas and discussion guides to get started (Collective Impact Forum 2014).

["What Is Popular Education?" Definition of the Month from Back Issues of The Popular Education News \(Edited\)](#)

- An outline that describes what "popular education" is and where the concept originated. It also provides various reading materials to better understand this teaching methodology and its applicability to social movements (Pop Ed News 2005).

Examples of energy-related local governance boards

The links below provide examples of various types of energy-related advisory local governance boards. They illustrate what local governments, CBOs, and others have used as criteria for selecting board members, governance structure, and the scope of their boards.

- [Boston's BERDO \(Building Emissions Reduction and Disclosure Ordinance\) review board](#)
- [DC's Modernizing the Energy Delivery System for Increased Sustainability Working Group](#)
- [Energy Affordability Collaborative \(Michigan\)](#)
- [Governor's Task Force on Climate Change \(Wisconsin\)](#)
- [Minneapolis Green Zones](#)

Resources for sample language and templates

These templates contain sample language and examples of agreements that teams could consider adopting in their LGB. They can be helpful during both the formation and operation stages.

- [CBO Grant Agreement and MOU Template \(Institute for Market Transformation\)](#)
- [Sample MOU \(redacted MOU from existing Emerald Cities Collaborative document\)](#)

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Appendix A

DARCI Template for Board Roles and Responsibilities (Template I)

These templates are intended to help program administrators and other decision-makers understand and explore roles and responsibilities related to the creation of an LGB. Before diving into the worksheet below, be sure to have a conversation with all partners explaining your program and your proposal. This will help partners better understand where they see themselves fitting into the matrix below and ensure everyone understands major milestones, objectives, and scope for programs. Program administrators and partners might print this template and work through the prompts below either independently or in small groups. Blank sections have been added to the table below to allow additional information to be entered as needed.

To begin, familiarize yourself with the DARCI acronym and description below.

DECISION-MAKER (and/or DELEGATOR):

Holds the ultimate power for this aspect of the project, through final approval/veto or delegating decision making to another person or entity. The "D" might be an individual leader, or it could be a group such as a management team or board.

ACCOUNTABLE:

The single person fully accountable for making this aspect of the project happen. The "A" must be given sufficient decision-making power and room to learn/adjust commensurate with accountability. It is possible for a "D" to also be the "A." There should never be more than one "A" to ensure clear accountability. If no one is willing to be the "A," do not proceed.

RESPONSIBLE:

Those responsible for doing the work on the project. There may be several "Rs" on a project. "Rs" are responsible for dealing with roadblocks, raising questions, etc., not just taking direction.

CONSULTED:

Those from whom input will be solicited.

INFORMED:

Those to be kept informed of important developments. This is an FYI role.

Key Groups:

- **Core Team** = lead project/program staff.
- **Project Partners** = group of representatives of all partner organizations on the program team who meet regularly.

- **Community-based organizations (CBOs)** = CBOs are representative of a community or significant segments of a community, defined by place or population, and provide financial, educational, cultural, and/or other resources aimed at enhancing health, wealth, and overall community well-being. For-profit entities and large nonprofits with a particular area of focus beyond the local level are typically excluded from this definition. Ideally, CBOs are physically based in the communities they serve, though in some cases CBOs can be effective even without a physical presence. CBOs range from formal organizations with legal non-profit status (501c3, c4, etc.) to informal, grassroots community groups that are mission-driven and headed by respected community leaders (Definition adapted from the [Just Transition PowerForce](#)).
- **Local Governance Board** = community members and community-based partners who will inform the design or evaluate programs. Can also include a group of representatives of those eligible to receive/those who have received upgrades within target neighborhoods.
- **Additional groups or partners:** _____
- _____

Once clear on the DARCI acronym, consider breaking into small groups. First fill out the table below individually for about 20 minutes (or as needed) then regroup to discuss who was listed in the columns below. Make sure to designate a note taker for key takeaways and areas of disagreement or alignment. It is important to come back together as a group to discuss findings and begin to take note of where further discussion might be needed.

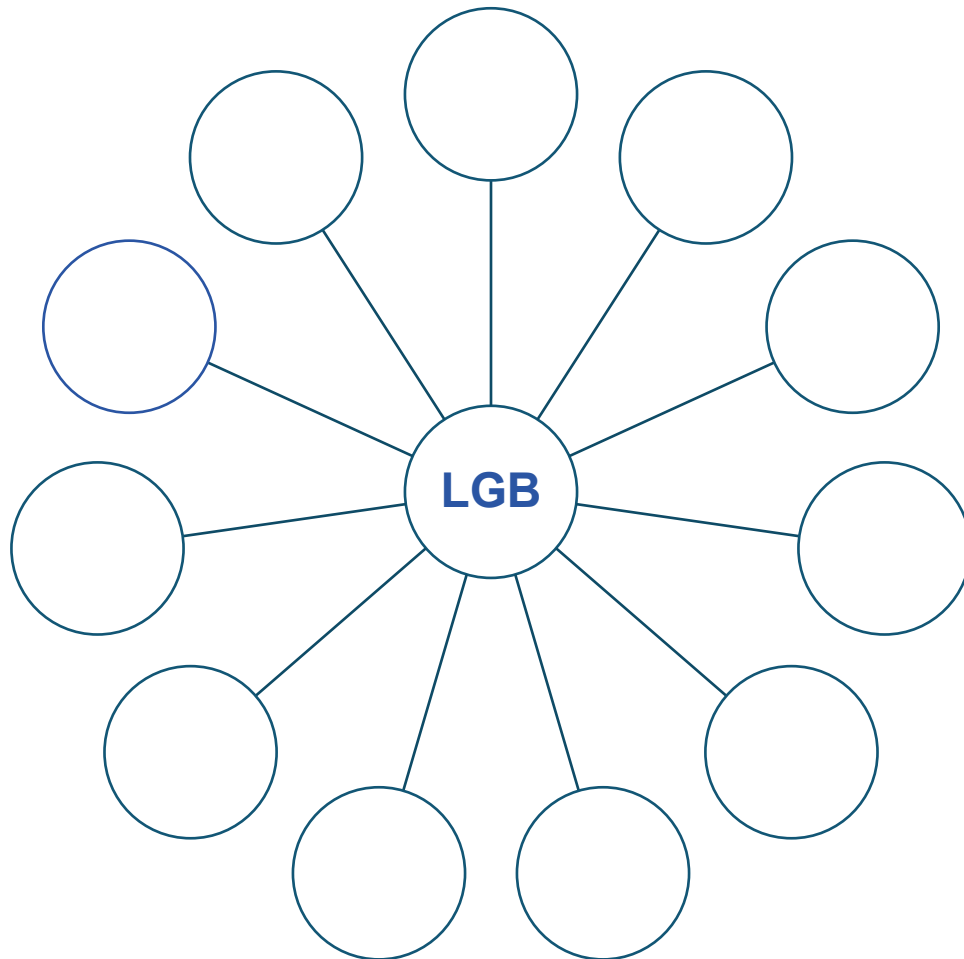
Action	Decision-Makers	Accountable	Responsible	Consulted	Informed
LGB recruitment & membership selection					
Project goals					
Program design to improve processes and expand benefits					
Community engagement strategy					
Develop community accountability plan ¹⁵					
Evaluation against community accountability plan					
Identify resources and partnerships for continuing and expanding the program to reach more community members and scale impact					

¹⁵ Community accountability plans, also known as community benefits agreements, are agreements typically negotiated among a project developer (e.g. building owner), community representatives, and a government or community facilitator (e.g. energy upgrade program). The developer typically agrees to fund specific programs or adapt building program/design in a way that benefits local communities. These agreements can be legally binding.

Who's at the table exercise (Template II)

Directions: Imagine each of the small circles around this "table" represent a seat on the LGB. In each circle, indicate a category of community expertise/experience to fill each "seat." Draw more small circles to add more "seats" as needed.

If you have initial ideas for individuals whom you would recommend engaging (to participate in the LGB or help identify others), note those next to the relevant circles.



Notes on important qualities or other considerations for selecting LGB members:

Notes on potential methods for LGB member recruitment (consider existing or new engagement opportunities/strategies):

Appendix B

Structure and considerations for various types of local governance boards

Local advisory boards: Advisory boards can be composed of a mix of community members, community-based organizations, and other stakeholders with the broad purpose of providing input on programs. They can also be composed of only community members and allow for their expertise to be embedded into programs by offering input on various topics identified by program administrators and their partners, who can then choose to accept and implement or reject suggestions/considerations raised by the LGB members.

Steering committee: Steering committees offer guidance around strategy, support alignment with shared goals, and track progress toward goals (Collective Impact Forum 2014). This structure can include program partners and other stakeholders, making power dynamics and values alignment more of a potential challenge. The main difference between a steering committee and other types of LGBs is the composition of the body and its location on the power-sharing spectrum outlined in Facilitating Power's Spectrum of Community Engagement, where steering committees typically have more ability to directly influence decisions. Power dynamics between program administrators and community members can be managed through membership composition, clear procedural and norms agreements between program partners and individual community members, or other means.

Circles: "Circles" are a commonly used sociocracy, which is a type of governance system that emphasizes decentralized and democratic decision making (Rau 2022). Circles may be as small as three people. Circles are responsible for executing, monitoring, and controlling the processes that are needed to run the group and accomplish the circle's aim (Rau 2022). No decisions that are in the domain of a given circle can be made by anyone outside the circle. Each circle identifies a delegate and a leader to participate in a larger "parent" circle that links all the small groups together to ensure information flows and decisions align. This type of structure is usually represented visually through interlocking circles.

Local resource groups: These groups provide a space for community members to informally discuss and share their experiences on a relevant topic. This structure does not provide robust opportunities for community decision making; it provides a space for community members to organize their thoughts, guidance, and local perspectives. Usually, these groups act as a way for decision-makers to gain insights from groups they typically do not engage with.

People's assembly groups: These are typically large local meetings centered around open-ended questions, allowing communities to collectively identify challenges and solutions, and often include elements of political education. These assemblies build trust and confidence in impacting systems change (Partners For Dignity & Rights and Race Forward 2023). Groups often

break into smaller ones for consensus before sharing with the larger assembly. While consensus can be difficult, these groups are vital for local leaders to analyze common problems and engage the larger community.