

# Advisory Boards and Higher Education's Urban Mission: Four Models

By Marcia Marker Feld

## Abstract

*As the technical assistance consultant to the Council of Independent Colleges' Implementing Urban Missions project, the author explores different models of advisory boards and their relationship to the urban mission of the colleges. Four models are presented, based on conceptual frameworks derived from two key articles on empowerment and citizen participation, and on grantee experiences. In cases where the urban mission seeks to encourage collaborative decision-making and to enhance community empowerment, it was found that the Hybrid Model (all partners/stakeholders) advisory board led to an optimum implementation of the urban mission goals: open governance, community and institutional empowerment, and substantive change in the higher education institution and the local community.*

Advisory boards represent a key strategy for involving the many constituencies of a college or university in the implementation of an urban mission. There are no cookie cutter models for the development of such boards—neither for their structure, their composition, nor their role in the process. Nor is there often agreement among participants on the assumptions and expectations that frame their creation and deliberations.

The Council of Independent College's *Implementing Urban Missions* grant program is described in some detail earlier in this journal issue. While the program's objectives did not mandate that every grantee create an advisory board, project guidelines did imply board existence by referring to many tasks which suggest the need for advisory boards, such as that "the project should demonstrate an interactive relationship with community," "measurable impact of grant activities on community needs and priorities," and "engage in community partnerships." Each grantee college I visited, as the program's technical assistance consultant, had a set of project activities and partnerships that generated many questions about advisory boards. The needs identified most often as technical assistance questions included identifying new grants to continue their work; developing and applying evaluation methodology; and assessing their advisory board and recommending changes, if necessary, to enhance the board's ability to enrich the project's activities and inform the decision-making process of the college-community project. Often the sole anchor institutions of the neighborhoods, colleges must form partnerships with community-based organizations and move toward a common vision (Feld 1998)

In this article, four models are posited which characterize the relationship of an advisory board to the urban mission of each college and their role in the project. The four models are drawn from the technical assistance site visits, the grantee interim reports, and two key articles in the literature. The articles, which are a part of the substantial literature on empowerment and citizen participation, span thirty years, 1969 to 1997, and are especially helpful in creating a conceptual framework for exploring the impact of advisory boards on urban missions.

During a grantee workshop, these four models were further refined by a discussion of two key questions: What other elements or assumptions are not reflected in the board models? And, which of the four models most closely approximates the role and form of the advisory group working with your campus' urban mission project? From this discussion, two typologies were developed to use in the further analysis of the models. The first typology elicits the most utilized model of an advisory board found in the CIC *Implementing Urban Missions* program, and the second typology assesses the impact of those models as measured by the "Participation-Empowerment framework." Lastly, this article also reviews the ways in which advisory boards may reflect and enhance the underlying goals of the urban mission as articulated in these projects.

## **Conceptual Framework: Community Participation and Community Empowerment**

Two key articles from the community organizing literature provide a conceptual framework for the exploration of appropriate models of community involvement in the higher education urban mission process.

Arnstein (1969) identified eight steps of citizen participation in a continuum predicated upon the assumption that powerlessness, that is, the lack of access to or participation in decision-making, is a political concept. The steps form a ladder that characterizes and measures the extent and quality of community participation. The article does not examine the interaction within each step nor suggest they are a continuum along which one will necessarily progress over time and experience. The eight steps, which begin at the bottom rung with the least effective forms of non-participation and continue to the most effective forms of full participation, are manifestations of her underlying conception of the poor as politically powerless.

## **Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation**

### **Non-participation**

1. *Manipulation*: a rubber stamp advisory committee, which is established to "educate" the public.
2. *Therapy*: powerlessness is synonymous with mental illness so the advisory committee becomes a group therapy session.

### **Tokenism**

3. *Informing*: one-way communication, which can be obfuscating and purposely confusing, or used as a way of informing a group of a previously made decision.
4. *Consultation*: inviting opinion, which is not taken seriously, possibly window dressing.
5. *Placation*: accepting and implementing a few simple suggestions from the group.

### **Power**

6. *Partnership*: negotiation between citizens and power holders.
7. *Delegated Power*: citizens (clients) assigned to run a program.
8. *Citizen Control*: community or neighborhood-controlled programs.

Elizabeth M. Rocha, some thirty years later, raises these same questions in a political context. Her article "A Ladder of Empowerment" argues that the notion of empowerment is rooted in the social movements of the 1960s and the self-help movements of the 1970s. She sees the definition of empowerment as ambiguous—Does it describe individuals or the community? This ambiguity is easily documented in practice and often contributes to a conflicted strategy of board design and implementation. Rocha proposes five steps along a continuum of individual/community empowerment. This ladder of empowerment can be understood by acknowledging two assumptions: first, the steps move progressively from less to more—from individual to community empowerment, and second, each step represents a good faith effort by individuals or organizations to facilitate a specific type of empowerment with its own method, goals, and appropriate locus. Empowerment, says Rocha, can be understood conceptually as encompassing a range of power experiences. The ladder of empowerment moves from a focus on the individual to a focus on community experiences of power.

## **Rocha's Ladder of Community Empowerment**

### **Community Empowerment**

Rung 5. *Political Empowerment*: Focus is community change operationalized through public policy, increased access.

Rung 4. *Socio-political Empowerment*: Focus on community empowerment, which emphasizes the development of a politicized link between individual and community conditions through collective social action.

Rung 3. *Mediated Empowerment*: A bridge between individual and community empowerment. It is the context of a mediating relationship between expert and client (one way transfer of information).

Rung 2. *Embedded Individual Empowerment*: Individual empowerment in a larger setting.

Rung 1. *Atomistic Individual Empowerment*: Focus is on the individual as a solitary unit.

### **Individual Empowerment**

While Arnstein's and Rocha's models share common assumptions, particularly of the poor as powerless, there are some differences. Arnstein's ladder is not systemic or generalizable except in local neighborhoods. Her definition of power in the eight steps is identical to Rocha's, although the locus shifts from individual to community. Rocha's definition of power has social psychological and political science roots and embodies many types of power experiences. She also understands empowerment as closely related to the goals, mission, and process of the situation/setting. Her final question asked is "What can be done to facilitate empowerment with the community?" My response includes purposeful structure, programmatic focus, and an understanding of the assumptions underlying empowerment in the specific context. These are all potential strategies of implementation through an appropriately structured advisory board. The design of an advisory board is usually based on assumptions about the ways the board's structure, membership, and role definition will influence (facilitate or control) the participation and empowerment of its members. Thinking of these conceptions of participation and empowerment, and looking at the experiences of the eight institutions in the CIC urban missions project, four different models of advisory boards can be identified.

## **Four Models of Advisory Boards: An Exploration of Best Practices**

The four models of advisory boards posited in this article played different roles in furthering the urban mission projects funded by CIC. Institutions used different approaches because, in their view, certain models seemed more likely to produce the outcomes sought in the urban mission project. The criteria for the design of an appropriate advisory board are found in the college's project mission statement, which frames assumptions about project stakeholders and their needs as well as the institutions' objectives.

In selecting among these four posited models, several questions must be considered:

- *Who is the client(s) of this project and the board?*
- *What assumptions emerge from staff or the college administration concerning an advisory board?*
- *What image is wanted for the advisory board?*
- *What expectations/goals are held for the advisory board?*
- *How will the advisory board relate to the college's urban mission?*
- *What is the role of the advisory board in the Urban Mission Project?*

In other words, the design of advisory board membership, structure, roles, and responsibilities must be intentionally matched with the mission and culture of the college and the project. It becomes easy to understand that advisory board failures (conflicts, disinterest, power struggles, etc.) are probably symptoms of a misalignment of the advisory board model and the project's mission and purposes. In the following sections, I will present force-field analyses, developed in part through a workshop with CIC grantees that reveal the strengths and weaknesses of each model. These analyses reveal

that each design can fit well with certain missions, situations, and expectations. Each model also requires particular strategies for member selection and the structure of roles and responsibilities so as to avoid the potential pitfalls.

**Model I: High Visibility (Distinguished Citizenry) Advisory Board**

The High Visibility advisory board consists of persons well known in the community, but not necessarily representative of or well informed about the institution or the community. The board’s role is broad and general, rather than task specific: to bring about a positive view of the institution and, in particular, to bring the college’s urban mission project to the attention of large constituent groups, the media, and/or funding sources.

**Model I Analysis**

<b>PRO</b>	<b>CON</b>
1. Validates the program	1. Poor attendance
2. Bring attention to project as involved powerbrokers	2. Little overall involvement
3. Bring in money	3. Hidden agendas
4. “Buy-in” from larger community	4. Detachment from community
5. Provides entree into higher levels of political and social power	5. Trust-integrity potential conflictive relationship
6. Builds confidence for staff	6. Impede empowerment of community and staff
7. Potential to engage in information dissemination	7. Lack of content expertise

The analysis shows that positive consequences include validation, external funding, publicity, and general public interest as well as leveraged power, while negative consequences may include poor attendance, superficial involvement, hidden agendas, detachment from the local community, and lack of content expertise.

**Model II: Client/Constituency Advisory Board**

This model is a joint committee of community participants and staff who are directly served by or who work with the urban mission project. Senior administration of the institution are rarely involved. The board’s role is to provide direct knowledge about community needs or issues. Like Model I, this type of board gives a sense of legitimacy to the institution’s urban mission project, but the members of Model II are more informed about and linked to constituent perspectives. A variant of this model is a board entirely composed of internal members; that is, a board of only those within the college who are involved with the work of the urban mission project. Some involved with urban higher education outreach would insist that these are the only real clients or stakeholders because the institution carries ultimate responsibility for outcomes, and ought to be the sole decision-makers. This variant will be labeled Model IIa: Internal Stakeholder advisory board. The analysis of both Model II and IIa are integrated into the force field analysis below.

### **Model II Analysis**

#### **PRO**

1. Needs of Community represented;  
Improves community self image
2. Immediate feedback work/institution
3. Empower community
4. Legitimization
5. Potential student recruitment
6. Community leadership development
7. Skills/Capacity-Building
8. Improved image

#### **CON**

1. Powerless if treated as tokens
2. Co-optation
3. Difficulty seeing bigger picture
4. Who does the group represent?
5. Narrow role for group of people  
may not know needs well
6. Possibility of low leadership skills
7. Many not showing up
8. Polarization

A summary shows that the positive consequences include evidence of community self-esteem; access to genuine information on needs and issues of the neighborhood; immediate feedback from clients and a sense of legitimacy and trust. It becomes much easier to recruit people for project activities and to develop and utilize local leadership. This also leads to a better image of the institution and a more trusting relationship with residents and potential students. Potentially negative consequences of this form of advisory board structure include the possibility it might be seen as tokenism or a rubber-stamping group. Depending on member selection, the form could give a narrow picture of the community or be seen by some as having members with low content knowledge or leadership skills; this board form could require an inordinate amount of staff time for member training and orientation.

### **Model III: Service Agencies/Service Stakeholder Advisory Board**

Advisory board members include staff of service providers who are directly involved with the project and in some instances, community clients. If the potential membership believes that one of the roles of the board is to distribute resources, there might be some conflict over selection of members since membership may be equated with special access to or influence over funds. This type of Board will provide up-to-date information and knowledge about the needs of the client/stakeholder and will inform the staff's decisions in assessing the success or challenge of project activities. The following force field analysis assessed the potential consequences.

### **Model III Analysis**

#### **PRO**

1. Access to information and resources
2. Knowledgeable of neighborhood service group
3. Strong organizational structure and context
4. Legitimization
5. Ongoing feedback and evaluation of service
6. Professionalization
7. Stability of attendance
8. New networks among agencies
9. Students as assets to agencies

#### **CON**

1. Political orientation to decisions
2. Protests from others outside the
3. Complacency
4. Turf battles, competing for funds
5. Old baggage
6. Not listening to clients
7. Paternalism
8. Focus on individual, not larger  
analysis
9. Narrow perspectives

A summary of the positive or negative consequences to the college and community portrays several interesting dimensions. As a positive consequence, this form of board will provide direct and immediate access to the service provider's knowledge and data. It will have persons with intimate relationships and/or access to the client. Since it is a board with service program roots in the community, it will provide stability to the board. However, there are potentially serious negative consequences of an application of this form. Many view it as a type of paternalism and promoting an "expert" culture among professional service providers who do not speak for the community, but state that they do so. It can create a sense of "insiders" and "outsiders," depending on effectiveness of communications with non-members. In addition, service providers often come to a board with excess baggage about the bad old days and are defensive in discussions. There are often turf battles and vested interests at the table, and occasionally a sense of complacency pervades the group.

**Model IV: Hybrid (All Partners/Stakeholders) Advisory Board**

This advisory board is made up of representatives of all the stakeholders. It often evolves from an open *ad hoc* committee, which sets the guidelines and structure of the project. Senior administrators may be involved if they are active in the project. The structure and role of the board and its processes are formal and known by all. The board usually has a chair, vice chair, and treasurer/secretary. Project staff act as staff to the board; the membership is often structured so that the community partners will win if there is a vote rather than a consensus decision.

**Model IV Analysis**

**PRO**

- 1. Knowledge empowering to all members
- 2. Balanced perspective
- 3. Everyone has a price; brings a resource
- 4. See problem from different perspectives
- 5. Building new networks
- 6. Innovative solutions
- 7. United front more effective force for change
- 8. Growing respect for challenges
- 9. More intentional; invest in board development & common mission

**CON**

- 1. Nothing in common
- 2. Blame/finger-pointing
- 3. Power differences
- 4. Be paralyzed
- 5. Lose bigger pictures
- 6. Closed club—may become exclusive

The positive consequences of this type of advisory board, through its comprehensive-ness, include its ability to present a united front that can validate the project to those persons or groups who are threatened by or do not understand the nature of the project. Equally, this model of advisory board will provide an immediate means of empowerment as persons representing groups of unequal resources and status sit together to make decisions. The possible negative consequences and problem with this type of advisory board is that there may be very little in common among the partners and therefore conflicting desires for different outcomes. The challenge is to build a common vision and sustain valid communications. There is an imperative not to focus on

the past but the future and to put aside power differences for a collaborative urban mission to meet joint needs. Sharing information and resources can create an incentive for the group to be closed to others, thus potentially losing sight of the bigger external picture or failing to adapt to changing conditions or new opportunities.

## Advisory Board Designs from the Implementing Urban Missions Program

Is there one best structure for an urban mission project advisory board? Are there commonalities or substantial differences among the models used by institutions participating in the CIC Urban Mission Program? In order to address these questions, an exploration of best practices among the eight projects was undertaken. The work was assessed by two different methods that use the Arnstein and Rocha concepts and the four models of boards proposed in this article.

First, we can assess the level of community and institutional participation by measuring the four board models along Arnstein’s eight steps: Non-participation, (Step 1, 2), Tokenism (Steps 3, 4, 5), and Power (Steps 6, 7, 8). We can then juxtapose the independent element of the level of participation against the dependent element of Rocha’s rungs of individual and community empowerment. By adding the step and rung levels together, we can derive a point total for each board model that describes the apparent impact of each on the institution and community regarding levels of participation and empowerment.

### Analysis of the Four Advisory Board Models Using the Arnstein/Rocha Framework

Board Model	Arnstein’s Participation Steps +	Rocha’s Empowerment Rungs	Points
I	Step 3 (Tokenism)	Rung 2 (Embedded Ind.)	5
II	Step 6 (Power)	Rung 4 (Socio-Pol.)	10
III	Step 4 (Tokenism)	Rung 3 (Mediated Emp)	7
IV	Step 7 (Power)	Rung 5 (Pol. Emp.)	12

This approach does measure the relationship of the model to the empowerment and participation of board members. Model IV Hybrid (All Partners/Stakeholders) advisory board ranks the highest in terms of total group participation and the implementation of empowerment techniques with 12 points. Second is Model II Client/Constituency advisory board with ten points. Third and fourth, respectively, is Model III Service Agency/Service Stakeholder advisory board at seven points and Model I High Visibility (Distinguished Citizenry) advisory board with five points. Clearly, when the goal of the a partnership project such as those in the CIC project is equal access to decision making, and a sense of empowerment in the project’s socio-political process, Model IV, an “All Partners” approach to board representation, is the appropriate model.

A second assessment considers the advisory board strategies used by five of the eight institutions in the CIC Implementing Urban Missions project. The following analysis lists each individual college advisory board according to the typology of four advisory board models. The critical element in assessing the Implementing Urban Missions project advisory boards in this typology is its ability to capture the gist of the urban mission and express it by role modeling, activities, or composition of the board. It should be noted that the guidelines of the grant program did not mandate an advisory board, but through the technical assistance provided institutions were strongly encouraged to form advisory boards. Since each institution has a unique urban mission and project, the criteria that are applied in this assessment are consistent with overall objectives of the CIC grant program, and were discussed by the staff and participants throughout the program:

- *Maximum community engagement.*
- *Equal and fair participation in the governance structure for communities and colleges.*
- *Reflect the goals of the grant program in the project.*
- *Institutional change process underway in curriculum, pedagogy, and faculty and student performance criteria with an emphasis on community service learning.*
- *Internal assessment of the urban mission and the project.*

### **CIC Urban Mission Institutions and the Four Advisory Board Models**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>II</b>	<b>IIa</b>	<b>III</b>	<b>IV</b>	<b>None</b>
Holy Family					X	
Columbia				X		
Johnson C. Smith	X					
Ohio Dominican						X
Mount St. Mary's					X	
Lesley		X				
Bloomfield						X
Marygrove						X
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Percent of Total</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>25.0</b>	<b>37.5</b>
<b>Key-Four Adviosry Board Models</b>						
<b>Model I</b>	<b>High Visibility advisory board</b>					
<b>Model II</b>	<b>Client/Constituency advisory board</b>					
<b>Model IIa</b>	<b>Internal Higher Education Institution Constituency advisory board</b>					
<b>Model III</b>	<b>Service Agency/Service Stakeholder advisory board</b>					
<b>Model IV</b>	<b>Hybrid (all partners/stakeholders) advisory board</b>					

Apart from the three institutions that did not create advisory boards, the most popular model was number IV, Hybrid (All Partners/Stakeholders) advisory board, which was

25 percent of the total boards. Of the remaining institutions, one of each of the following models was used: Model I (High Visibility); Model II (Client/Constituency); and Model III (Service Agencies/Service Stakeholder).

The use of advisory board models that ranked higher in participation and empowerment reflect the strength of the urban missions of independent colleges and the grassroots nature of several of the projects. Emerging from this assessment and implicit within it are several useful strategies for organizing an advisory board appropriate to the needs of the institution and community. One of the most helpful strategies is to gather a group of stakeholders from within the college and the community to collectively define the institution's urban mission and the mission of the project. Once that is determined and agreed to, the structure and membership of the advisory board can be selected to match the mission and goals.

## **Conclusion**

What form of advisory board will show democratic interaction and reciprocity between an institution of higher education and its community partners? What form will enhance the probability of measurable impacts on community needs and priorities? These were questions that institutions in the CIC project had to consider as they organized their individual projects. Different types of advisory groups emerged, some casually and without planning, and others as a result of retreats, discussion, and technical assistance. From this experience, four models were identified and analyzed, drawing on two conceptual frameworks and direct observation of the words and actions of program participants.

In the analyses, Model IV Hybrid (all Partners/Stakeholders) advisory board and Model II (Client/Constituency) advisory board were most closely aligned with the urban mission projects as measured by substantial citizen participation and community empowerment, as well as the shared understanding of the general criteria of the overall grant program. When an advisory board is the outcome of early collaborative, shared decision-making power and mutually respectful working relationships, the urban mission is advanced. The advisory board model must align with the intentions and goals of the project, and be so understood by all partners. This requires recognition that the community is a partner in the institution's mission of educating its students and the college is a partner in assisting the community in solving urban problems. Each of CIC's urban mission projects was unique to the individual college and community, but all illustrate common values and goals—a collaborative strategy for addressing urban problems and strengthening academic activities. What lies at the heart of all urban mission advisory boards is manifest respect for the other's integrity, an expectation of openness, and a focus on building mutual capacity leading to empowerment and a sustainable quality environment in which to live and learn.

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