



Quick Reference Handout 8.2: Recruiting a Representative and Reflective PC/PB

Membership Requirements in the Legislation

The Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program (RWHAP) legislation states clear requirements for the membership of a Part A planning council:

- **Representation:** It must include individuals that represent clearly specified membership categories, some based on organizational affiliation (for example, a RWHAP Part C recipient, social service provider) or group (for example, recently incarcerated people living with HIV, federally recognized Indian tribe).
- **Unaligned consumer membership:** At least 33 percent of voting members must be people living with HIV (PLWH) who are receiving services from a RWHAP subrecipient but are not staff, consultants, or directors of a service provider that has or is seeking RWHAP Part A funds.
- **Reflectiveness:** Both the membership as a whole and unaligned consumer membership must be reflective of the local HIV epidemic in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, and age, "with particular consideration given to disproportionately affected and historically underserved groups and subpopulations."¹

RWHAP legislation requires member diversity because of its importance in helping PC/PBs identify and address "disparities in access and services among affected subpopulations and historically underserved communities."² Reducing HIV-related health disparities and health inequities is also one of the four primary National HIV/AIDS Strategy (NHAS) goals to end the epidemic.³

While the legislation does not specify membership requirements for Part A planning bodies that are not planning councils, the Health Resources and Services Administration's HIV/AIDS Bureau (HRSA/HAB) recommends that these bodies look as much like planning councils as possible in terms of membership.

The legislation also requires an open nominations process: "Nominations for membership on the council shall be identified through an open process and candidates shall be selected based on locally delineated and publicized criteria."⁴ Members are appointed by the Chief Elected Official (CEO) of the recipient jurisdiction.

Meeting Legislative Requirements for Membership

To meet both legislative requirements and local membership needs, a PC/PB requires a well-structured recruitment and selection process, involving multiple steps and strategies. Here are some sound practices that can contribute to a successful process:

1. **Plan for an annual nominations cycle, supplemented by ongoing efforts to fill vacancies occurring throughout the year.** This means most new members each year will enter in a group and can receive orientation and develop experience together.
2. **Identify the “disproportionately affected and historically underserved populations” in your EMA/TGA to focus on for membership in order to address disparities in care.** These are typically racial and ethnic minority and other marginalized communities. Your local epi profile, needs assessment, HIV care continuum, and service utilization data can help you identify these populations. In addition to communities of color, these groups often include immigrants from a particular country or region, especially those who with limited English proficiency (LEP), and other groups subject to high levels of stigma, including gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) individuals.
3. **Determine what membership slots your PC/PB will need to fill each cycle,** in terms of legislatively required categories, consumer members, and member characteristics to ensure reflectiveness. For use by the committee responsible for membership, the PC/PB should keep an updated listing of members that indicates for each individual member:
 - Current term of service, and whether the member will be required to cycle off the PC/PB as of a specific date due to term limits
 - The membership category currently filled by that member (Remember that with a few exceptions, a member may fill only one category)
 - Other membership categories this member is qualified to fill—for example, a person might represent a housing program but also be qualified to serve as a non-elected community leader if that category is harder to fill
 - Characteristics related to reflectiveness: HRSA/HAB requires at least race/ethnicity, gender, and age, plus a focus on “disproportionately affected or historically underserved populations”
 - HIV status for individuals who are publicly disclosed as HIV-positive, and whether “unaligned”
 - Other factors important to your PC/PB, such as affiliation with a community facing health disparities, locations within the EMA or TGA (such as members from different neighborhoods, municipalities, or counties within the service area)

The *Part A Planning Council/Planning Body Reflectiveness and Roster*⁵ that is submitted to HRSA/HAB by recipients as part of the annual Program Terms Report provides a good starting point for a representation and reflectiveness chart. Also remember: it is all right to have representation above the required minimum level in order to include populations of special concern in your jurisdiction—PLWH who are most likely to depend upon RWHAP for care.

4. **Discuss hard-to-fill service categories and challenging demographics**—and think creatively about how to fill them. For example:
 - If you have had difficulty finding a “hospital planning or health care planning agency” representative, think about the various types of health care agencies that might have planners on staff and an interest in HIV care—such as a primary care association or a federally qualified health center.

- If your EMA/TGA is located far away from the state capital and it is hard to obtain RWHAP Part B or Medicaid agency representation, see if someone from a regional or local office of the agency might be interested.
 - If your city or county will not approve individuals with felony convictions as members, and you cannot negotiate a change in order to meet federal requirements, look for a staff member from a halfway house or other agency serving recently incarcerated PLWH.
 - If you have faced challenges recruiting young members, don't limit recruitment to young unaligned consumers. Consider young adults who are on staff at HIV service agencies or who are emerging leaders in the community. Once they become members, they can help you recruit young PLWH.
5. **Do concentrated, targeted outreach using a variety of methods.** Allow time for various types of outreach, using social media, specialized community media, and direct contacts with service providers, universities, and other entities. Be prepared to work with appropriate PC/PB members to reach out to key target communities by making presentations, sending materials, and talking to community leaders and groups. While the responsible committee (usually called Membership or Operations) usually takes the lead, ask the PLWH Committee to assist with outreach, especially to consumers and other PLWH. Ask current members to reach out to key demographic groups based on their own demographics and their personal and professional contacts. Remember that potential applicants may be motivated by a personal invitation to apply from someone they know, especially someone already serving on the PC/PB.
 6. **Time your nominations process to have recruitment and review of applicants completed well before your jurisdiction's annual appointment/reappointment date.** The process should be scheduled so that all phases—from identifying slots through PC/PB approval of nominations and vetting and appointment by the CEO—are completed before current member terms end. Some PC/PBs have provisions in their bylaws that current members continue to serve until their replacements are appointed and seated, but you want to avoid such situations where possible.
 7. **Use an easy-to-complete plain language application form,** offering applicants the opportunity to apply online or by hand, with applications coming to the PC/PB support office. Allow use of a resume, but don't require one; it can discourage applications from people who don't have one. Use several open-ended questions to allow applicants to talk about their experience and background, including knowledge about HIV and about the RWHAP. Be sure to ask about special interests and skills of interest to your PC/PB.
 8. **Use recruitment and application materials that emphasize your strong commitment to active engagement of unaligned consumers and other people living with HIV**—and include recruitment priorities and selection criteria. For example, define “unaligned consumer,” and indicate what level of public disclosure of HIV status is required. HRSA/HAB requires that the PC/PB include at least two consumers who publicly identify themselves as PLWH,⁶ and any local requirements beyond this minimum need to be stated. Some jurisdictions require all unaligned consumer members to be publicly disclosed. Others require full disclosure within the PC/PB but not in minutes or other public documents. Still others allow status to be known only by the PC/PB support manager, Membership Committee, or Chair/Co-Chair. Have a clear policy and state it in recruitment and application documents. Be clear about time requirements, meeting schedules, reimbursement of transportation expenses—and the importance of active consumer participation.

9. **If your jurisdiction and PLWH community include a substantial number of people who speak languages other than English at home, make application and descriptive materials available in those languages**—and advertise in media and community sources serving those communities. Be clear in the application whether you offer interpretation during meetings, and in what languages.
10. **Use a structured, fair, and thorough screening process.** The responsible committee must review applications, with help from PC/PB support staff for preliminary steps such as logging in applications, determining which slots an applicant is eligible to fill, which applicants are unaligned consumers, acknowledging receipt of the application, and identifying and requesting any missing information. The committee should group applicants based on open slots, regularly review the number and mix of applications, identify categories or demographic groups from which no applications have been received, and do further outreach. Usually the committee will use a review form to summarize or assess information for all complete applications that fit at least one membership category, using a consistent process. Many jurisdictions establish small (often 3-person) groups, and each group reviews and scores assigned applications. Committee members do not review applications from people they know. A scale is often used to rate responses to each question or section of the application—from 5 for “fully meets criteria” to 1 for “does not meet criteria.” An applicant may need an average (mean) score above the midpoint (for example, 3 for a 5-point scale) to be considered qualified for membership. Screening may be based on the written materials, or applicants may be interviewed.
11. **Require current members eligible for another term to go through some form of reapplication process.** Reappointment should consider such factors as attendance at PC/PB meetings and active participation on a committee. Some jurisdictions do not require current members to be interviewed, but do expect them to indicate what they have done to strengthen services to PLWH through their PC/PB membership and what they commit to do if reappointed.
12. **Involve the entire PC/PB in the open nominations process**—not only as the last step in reviewing nominees from the Membership Committee and approving their recommendation to the CEO, but also in recruiting potential candidates.
13. **Develop a pipeline of qualified potential members throughout the year.** Jurisdictions do this in many ways, such as:
 - Including non-PC/PB members as members of some PC/PB committees, with an application process and commitment to participation
 - Providing training for potential members, especially but not only PLWH (One example is Learning, Empowerment, Advocacy, Participation or LEAP in Houston)⁷
 - Maintaining an “associate” or similar category of non-voting members who are full PC/PB members-in-training (as Atlanta does) or who apply, receive training, and serve as alternates to current members (as in Hudson County/Jersey City, NJ and Los Angeles)
 - Using your PLWH Committee or Consumer Caucus as a vehicle for recruiting and engaging potential members
 - Keeping applications active for 1-2 years and adding the applicants to your electronic mailing list after recording their service category eligibility and demographic characteristics, in case they fit the criteria to fill a future vacancy

14. **When vacancies occur during the year, nominate people for the remainder of the uncompleted term rather than providing a full term for the new member.** This maintains a cycle with a set proportion of members that have terms ending at the same time each year (one-third of members if you have three-year terms, one-half if you have two-year terms, etc.), and reduces the future number of new members who join the PC/PB mid-year and need an orientation off-cycle.
15. **Engage, train, and support your members—and use their positive experiences as a recruitment tool for others.** A PC/PB that provides sound orientation, ongoing training, a positive meeting environment, and ongoing support and appreciation for current members will find it easier to recruit new ones.
16. **Assess and refine your process.** Review your successes and challenges in recruitment and ask new members and other applicants for feedback on the process. Use this information to do a better job next year.

References

- 1 RWHAP Legislation, Section 2602(b)(1).
- 2 RWHAP Legislation, Section 2602(b)(4)(b)(ii).
- 3 See National HIV/AIDS Strategy: Updated to 2020, at <https://hab.hrsa.gov/about-ryan-white-hiv-aids-program/national-hiv-aids-strategy-updated-2020>.
- 4 RWHAP Legislation, Section 2602(b)(1).
- 5 See the FY18 Part A Planning Council/Planning Body Reflectiveness and Roster, at <https://nextlevel.targethiv.org/library/fy2018-part-program-terms-report-and-program-submission>.
- 6 See Part A Manual, Section X. Planning Council Operations, Chapter 6. PLWHA/Consumer Participation, p 124.
- 7 See information about the program, including links to the application and an informational brochure, on the Houston PC's website, at <http://www.rwpchouston.org/Project%20LEAP/Project%20LEAP.htm>, or download the "Do-It-Yourself" LEAP Kit from <http://www.rwpchouston.org/Project%20LEAP/MyProjectLEAP.htm>.