Convening Knowledges Programme

Community Advisory Boards

Nicola Gratton and Adam Gratton

July 2024

The Community Cast

Contents

Introduction

The Convening Knowledges programme aims to connect diverse knowledge resources and network the people and organisations who hold them. It also explores the mechanisms through which we can bring this knowledge together in ways that are representative of the diverse types of knowledge, useful in terms of the value of the knowledge produced and the impact it has, accessible and inclusive and value for money.

The Community Cast were commissioned by the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) to pilot a knowledge convening initiative on the topic:

What is known about designing and implementing Community Advisory Boards (CABs)?

The commission was designed to devise and deliver an approach to draw together diverse types of knowledge about CABs in a way that seeks to maximise and balance representativeness, usefulness, accessibility and inclusiveness, and value for money.

At The Community Cast we aim to amplify the voices of communities by supporting them to create the cast through which they can own their stories and mould their futures. Using a combination of cocreated methods built around digital, journalistic and media practices we work alongside and empower a diverse range of individuals and community groups.

For millennia, storytelling has been used to pass knowledge from one generation to the next, to learn and to strengthen community bonds. The Community Cast saw the potential of using storytelling to convene knowledge from a diverse range of sources on CABs. We proposed the use of a limited podcast series and an online knowledge 'hub' to gather knowledge in accessible and inclusive formats that appeal to a broad audience. Through these methods we aimed to ensure the expertise of a range of actors contributed to the collective understanding about CABs and the outputs comprised of useful, accessible and engaging knowledges that connect interested parties and have potential for real world impact.

In this report we introduce the methodology adopted to convene knowledge about CABs, and provide an outline of the project outputs, including each of the podcast episodes and the online resource hub. We draw together the findings from the project that help us understand what is known about designing and implementing CABs.

To support the wider Convening Knowledges programme, we reflect on the use of podcasts and an online resource hub as an effective mechanism for convene knowledge and conclude with recommendations for future work.

Methodology

To understand 'What is known about designing and implementing Community Advisory Boards (CABs)?' we adopted the following approach:

Rapid Literature Review: We conducted a rapid literature review to identify key topics and themes and understand where existing knowledge exists.

Planning and designing questionnaires, interviews and events: We designed our questions and approach to enable storytelling, including a period of desk research, an Engage Conference Encounter session, knowledge mapping, a survey and podcast interviews. While our questions for the podcast episodes were tailored to the individual's experiences and expertise, our core questions for the survey and Encounter session included:

- Are you or have you been involved in a CAB in any way?
- Can you share any knowledge of good practice in designing and running a CAB?
- What kinds of challenges can be faced in resourcing, designing, implementing and facilitating CABs?
- What challenges or barriers might CAB participants experience?
- Are there any resources about CAB that you have found particularly helpful?

- Do you think there are gaps in knowledge or understanding about CABs that need to be filled?
- Whose voices would you like to hear represented on the podcast?

Knowledge and stakeholder mapping: We conducted a period of desk research, stakeholder mapping and recruitment. We facilitated an Encounter session at Engage 2024, identified several facilitators of CAB and gathered knowledge of other current CABs in the UK and across the globe from within and outside of HE. We reached out to other facilitators using a survey distributed through the PEP network and using existing knowledge from with NCCPE. We connected with CAB members through facilitators and leaders of CABs.

Knowledge Convening: We convened knowledges about CABs through the survey, the Engage Conference Encounter Session and a series of podcast interviews that were recorded and edited into a limited series.

Story gathering and content creation: We gathered resources and useful information to be hosted on the NCCPE website. We gathered the knowledge collected through the survey, events and podcast interviews. We used the resources and literature and survey findings to inform the themes for the podcasts. We recorded and edited a series of 4 podcast episodes and reflected on the use of podcasts as a useful tool for convening knowledges (page 14).

Dissemination of outputs and findings: We have liaised with the NCCPE's communication team and co-created a website to host the podcasts and resources. We have produced this accessible report targeting PEPs and CAB members.

Reflection and evaluation: We will connect with the NCCPE team and Jude Freedman in September 2025 to reflect on the approach adopted.
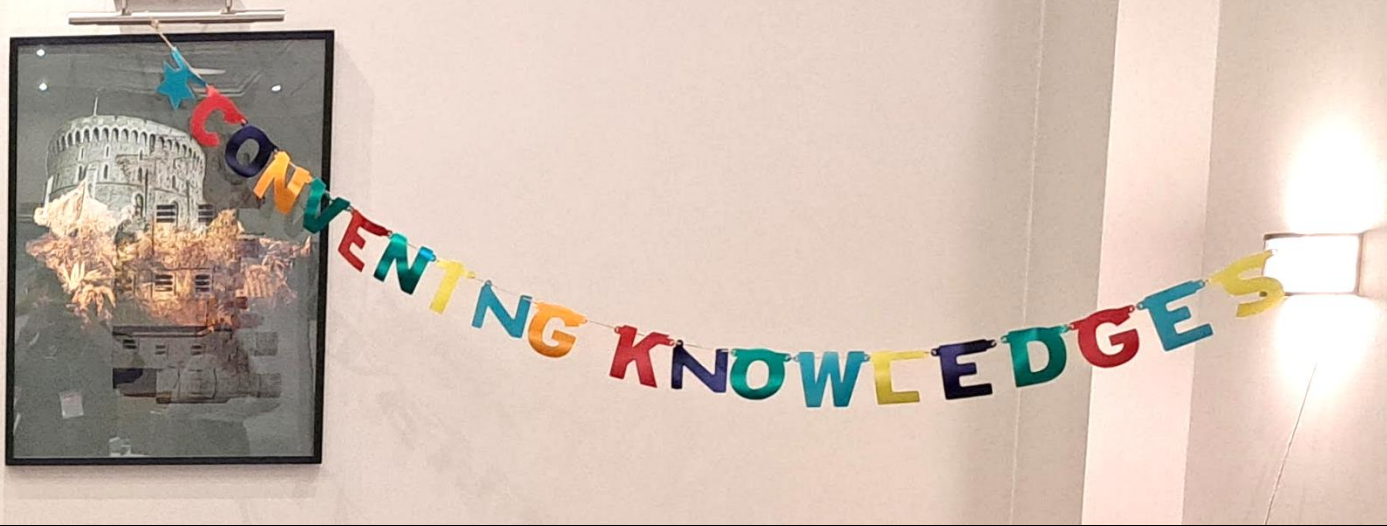
Project Outputs

The Convening Knowledges: Community Advisory Boards programme has created the following outputs:

A podcast series

The Convening Knowledges podcast on Community Advosry Boards is a series of four episodes.

Episode 1. Jessica Salzwedel is New York based Senior Programme Manager for Research Engagement for AVAC. She uses participatory practice to create a framework for stakeholder engagement in research. She runs and facilitates three global Community Advisory Boards for the HIV Cure Research programme. She talks about how she works with the Community Engagement Boards to change the ecosystem of engagement and the challenges of measuring successful engagement. (33.48 mins)

Episode 2. Alun Davies has spent the last 20 years in global health research, mainly working in Kenya and is a member of the Global Heath Network which is part of the University of Oxford. He has extensive experience of different Community Advisory Boards. Alun talks about the importance of training for Community Advisory Boards, the need for the use of interactive methods in engaging communities with research and the need to consider the wider programme of community engagement around Community Advisory Boards. (26:53 mins)

Episode 3. In May 2024, we attended the Engage Conference and spoke to a number of public engagement professionals working in higher education or community research settings. Contributors to this episode include: Daisy Hopkins, Science Engagement

Coordinator for the Public Engagement in Research Team at the University of Oxford; Angela Henderson, Head of Engagement at Newcastle University, Budd Hall, UNESCO Chair of Community Based Research and Ben Meller, Public Engagement Associate. They talk about the benefits and challenges of facilitating Community Advisory Boards, the learning we can take from using a community organising approach to listen to communities, the ethical implications of community research and how community advisory boards can address some of these challenges, and some of the strategies and structures we can adopt to ensure ethical and responsible community engagement in research. (25:43 mins)

Episode 4. Our final episode hears from four members of Staffs CAN, a Community Advisory Board that informs Staffordshire University's wider community engagement activity. Ayad Ali-Ani, Sarah Forshaw, Nina Gilburt and Maurice Greenham discuss the value bring the voice of lived experience into university activities through Community Advisory Boards and the role of playfulness in supporting wider community engagement.

Literature review and open resources (to be made available on NCCPE website)
We have compiled a list of resources, literature, including weblinks and summaries, and examples CABs into a document to be posted on the NCCPE Convening Knowledges webpage.
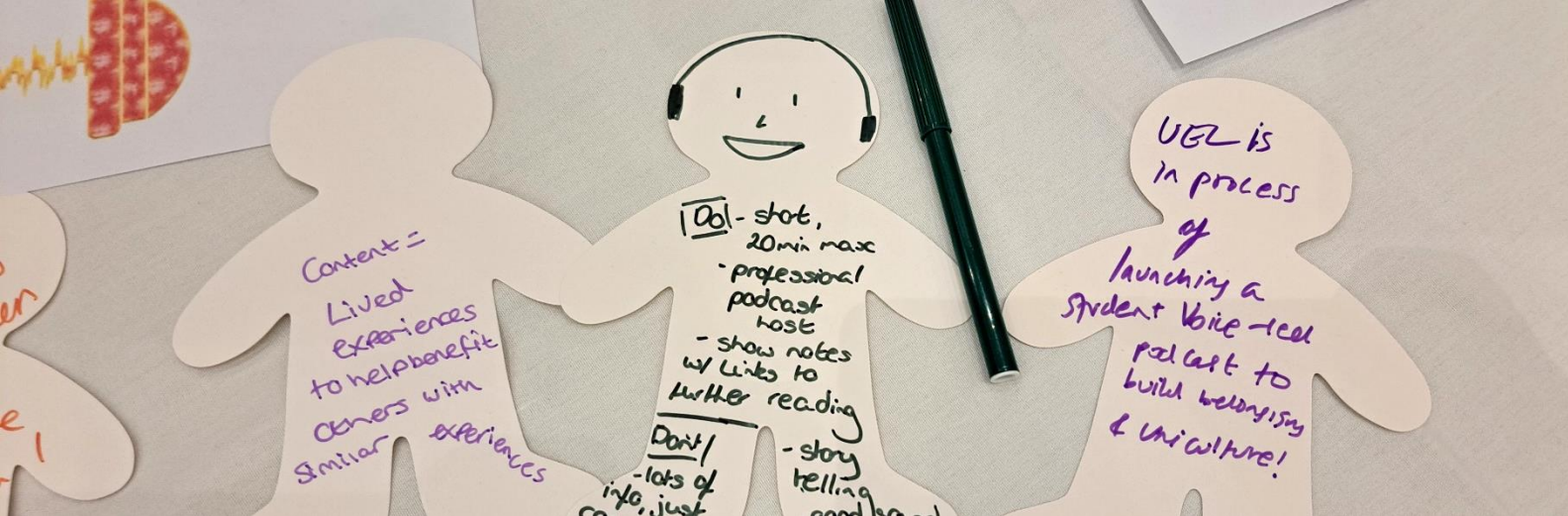
Findings

Convening Knowledge about CABs gathered knowledge about designing and implementing Community Advisory Boards through podcast interviews, a survey, an Encounter session at Engage 2024 and a rapid literature review.

The variation and diversity of CABs.
There is wide variation between the purposes and approaches adopted by the CABs highlighted through the project. Most CABs outlined were research based, though which communities advised on specific research projects or clinical trials or informed a specific research centre or Higher Education department. Many of these were health related. Others however had a wider institutional civic remit, including CABs that informed a university's wider community engagement strategy and another that informed a civic university agreement.

The various purposes of the CABs identified through the project included:
- Improving the ecosystem for health
- Influencing research and policy
- Developing a long-term relationship to understand how communities engage with research
- Translating research for communities and providing researchers with insights into how the research will be received by consumers
- Influencing research and policy
- Helping indigenous communities have ownership, control access to research and supporting them to protect the knowledge generated through research
- Providing an ethical approval process for community-initiated research

- Providing institutions with an authentic view and giving space for lived experience to inform decision making.

> **"*It's creating a culture of care within the research community.*" Budd Hall**

Having a clearly defined purpose was identified as good practice when developing CABs, providing clarity for communities and researchers, and encouraging sustained member involvement.

CAB Underlying principles and influences
For several of our podcast contributors, CABs were situated in a wider infrastructure for community engagement, with these being just one way in which the institutions-built relationships with their communities. The CAB engagement was influenced by participatory practices, asset-based community development and ethical principles.

Mapping the assets of a community, developing a culture of respect and shared ownership, and ensuring shared decision making can all contribute to an ecosystem of community engagement that means CABs produce meaningful engagement with authentic routes to influencing practice, not "just a rubber stamp" exercise. (Jessica Salzwedel podcast episode).

CAB membership
Membership of CABs was informed by either geographical location or a community of interest. This project gathered knowledge from CABs that represent communities from across the globe, including Canada, Kenya, South America and the UK. Most CABs were keen to ensure they represent a diverse membership and were considerate of ensuring representation across age ranges, ethnicity, gender and disability. To do this, one institution recruited an external company to reach beyond their own natural network. Some institutions have a closed application process with clear criteria for inclusion. Others have an open membership grown organically over time. One podcast contributor warns of the dangers of becoming complacent about the diversity of the CAB membership. Having a diverse group based on protected characteristics does not necessarily mean there is a diversity of perspectives.

Power inequity between institutions and CABs is a challenge faced by many. The need to develop inclusive practices when implementing CABs was also noted. The use of accessible language and translating complex ideas into accessible information was considered vital to ensure accessibility to the group, especially by members of CABs. There was a recognition that trust between the institution and community is required to develop an effective CAB and that, in turn, CABs can be a vehicle through which trust is built. Committing time to develop long term relationships, being frank, honest and transparent, acknowledging the expertise of CAB members, listening and being responsive were identified as ways of growing this trust with members.

Several contributors noted that it was vital that institutions were responsive to the ideas raised through the CAB. One contributor reframed their CAB as a group of 'accountability partners'. This repositioned the power in favour of the Accountability Partners whose remit was to hold the university to account on the projects it was delivering.

CAB member motivations
Some contributors noted how it was difficult to sustain motivation of CAB members in long trails over a number of years. Other CABs has a more open, network membership meaning their engagement with CAB meetings could be more informal to suit their own life commitments.

It was noted that CAB members are motivated by having a clear focus and being able to contribute to their community. The need to listen to and value the contributions of CAB members and respond to their ideas was seen as important to sustain motivation.

Engagement techniques
Some contributors discussed the value of using a range of creative or immersive engagement techniques to improve the accessibility of the group and information, reduce the power inequalities between academics and community members and connect the community members with the research or other topic of discussion. These included using animations, theatre, board games and immersive trails. Introducing these techniques has helped to make research, and in some cases universities more broadly, accessible, engaging and relevant.

CAB leadership and strategies

The project outlines several leadership strategies that can enhance the CAB experience and effectiveness.

Long term investment in CABs is vital to their success and longevity. The survey identified that a lack of resources, including staff time, was a challenge for some CABs. Others indicated the value of a small amount of funding to pay for food, refreshments or parking. Embedding CABs into institutional strategy can help to support their resourcing.

"Engagement needs to be funded and have infrastructure built in the same way you would build a lab. I mean, nobody would put a flow cytometry machine in a lab for a trail and then take it away." Jessica Salzwedel.

The contributors varied in their feelings about payment for CAB members. While all covered expenses, there was discussion about finding the balance of incentives for CAB members. There was recognition that too little payment would exploit the members. On the other hand, however, there were concerns that too much payment, or excessive incentives, would result in the CAB members not being independent and feeling unable to give their own opinions if these differ from the facilitator. Facilitators used guidance to support decision making about payments to CAB members, including NIHR guidance and Scot Gov Payment Guidance. Others suggested consulting with the group to decide the levels of payments that would be most appropriate.

Some contributors were concerned that payment for CAB members can result in a transactional relationship and therefore other incentives were offered, such as headshots, media training, providing abstract reviews to attend conference, writing letter of recommendation. This approach builds the infrastructure for community engagement and provides mutual benefit to the institution and CAB members.

Some CAB facilitators provide training, including literacy, core or foundational knowledge to support their engagement with the research providing a level playing field within the research environment.

Well trained and experienced facilitators with strong group work and reflection skills are required to manage the dynamics within CABs.

Several contributors discussed the need to manage the dynamics of the group, supporting quieter members to engage and encouraging other members not to dominate. Co-created ground rules were noted as an effective mechanism for this. Facilitators being able to continually reflect on their own position in the group, it's purpose and impact is also important.

> *"If you want to know how to do it, you ask people directly. They will tell you."*
> **Alun Davies.**

Accessibility and reach can be improved through careful consideration of how the group convenes. For some CABs, face to face meetings facilitate greater engagement and collaboration within the CAB. Geographically situated CABs make use of this strategy to bring people together and build relationships through informal discussions, networking and interactive activities. Providing food can facilitate this interaction.

For others, virtual meetings provide the opportunity to extend the reach of a CAB to a wider community of interest, diversifying the cultures and perspectives CABs can bring to an issue or topic.

Clarity of purpose can be aided by an established Terms of Reference (TOR), although not all CABs had a formal TOR, preferring a more organic approach to the development of the aims and objectives of the CAB. There was variation between the formality of the CABs included in this project, with some being operated as formal, minuted meetings, and others being delivered using more immersive and playful methods. In all scenarios, clear communication between facilitators and CAB members was highlighted as vital to the CABs success. Good communication engages members, helps to recruit new members and motivates sustain involvement.

Finally, the need for a team approach has been recognised. It was noted that there is expertise in the institutions and within the communities themselves that could support the CAB delivery and facilitation. Strategies such as rotating the chair of the CAB have helped to promote an ethos of shared ownership. There is also learning that can be gleaned from other practitioners from across the globe that can support new and developing CABs.

Reflections

The number of global podcast listeners has increased from 274.8 million in 2019 to 504.9 million in 2024 (Statista, 2024, [Number of podcast listeners worldwide 2024 | Statista](#)). 19.1 million people in the UK listen to podcasts , with 48% of these listen to podcasts to learn something new (Ljubica Stojcheva, Cybercrew, 2023, [Podcast Statistics — Top Podcasts UK [2023] (cybercrew.uk)](#)

The Engage Encounter session provided us with an opportunity to discuss the potential use of podcasting to convene knowledges with public engagement professionals (PEPs), one potential audience for the podcast series. Feedback from the session highlighted that one the whole, people felt that podcasting could help to convene and share new knowledge an innovative and engaging way. The participants were clear that the podcast episodes should be short, to allow them to listen to them on their commute, and include voices of people not usually heard in relations to CABs, including voices of lived experiences.

A four-episode podcast series has been created as a pilot to test the success of using this methodology to convene knowledge about CABs. The approach has, to date, been a largely successful. The four podcasts, and the conversational nature of the interactions have provided insights that would not have been found using more traditional desk-based research methods. The podcasting method gave equal value to the voices of CAB

members, people with a wider community engagement remit and experienced CAB practitioners. Learning from both global and local CABs has been included.

The podcasts draw on knowledge from experienced CAB facilitators, HE public Engagement professional and CAB members themselves. The podcasting format provides insights into the varying experiences of each of the contributors, giving listeners a range of personal and professional stories to learn from. The approach we adopted, therefore, reflects the diversity of CABs and the members. It does not provide one 'how to guide' for CABs but offers listeners an opportunity to immerse themselves in stories about CAB involvement, allowing them to glean the information most relevant to their own setting.

In addition to the podcast episodes, our approach included the development of a resource bank to host easily accessible resources about CABs. While this will include a range of different resources, including toolkits, academic literature, reports and webinar recordings, the resources bank will require regular updating to ensure it remains current. Our original proposal was to develop an online discussion forum and resource hub to create a network of practitioners who will continue to share learning, resources and knowledge beyond the scope of this commission. However, the infrastructure to support this beyond the end of the commission was not available at the time. To continue building on the knowledge generated through this project, we suggest building an online community around CABs could help to gather knowledges currently out of reach to many.

This work has been underpinned by The Community Cast's Statement of Ethical practice and therefore incorporates the core principles of participation, diversity and inclusion, collectively, storytelling and creative space and choice and transparency. In practice this has meant:

- Th project has been guided by the ideas and needs of those people who will most benefit from the work. The Encounter session and survey have shaped the project outputs.
- The project has aimed to tackle knowledge hierarchies and has sought to include the voices of a broad range of people including experienced practitioners and CAB members. We have been guided by the people included in the podcast and highlighted the areas they wanted to include.

15

- We have built fledgling relationships with the podcast contributors and included episodes that highlight individual and collective voices.
- Storytelling and creative space have been central to our approach. The use of podcasts to tell the story of CABs has been well received by participants so far.
- All participants were given the opportunity to listen to and review the podcast prior to publication.

The project faced a small number of challenges that have limited the scale of the project. The greatest challenge has been the commission timescale. Creating podcasts episodes that go beyond a transactional, extractive relationship requires time to get to know the participants, understand their work, ensure they are comfortable with the process and negotiate the themes they would like to discuss, and following up with them afterwards to ensure they have an opportunity to listen to the podcast before it is published. In addition to this, each podcast episode took and hour and a half to record and an additional 4 hours to edit, and up to 6 hours for more complex episodes. We therefore limited the podcast series to 4 episodes to ensure the commission could be completed to the quality we would expect within the specified time frame.

The limited timeframe also impacted the people we have been able to include on the podcast. We have, for example, contacted community research teams in Canada who are willing to record a group podcast episode. However, due to annual leave, the inclusion and coordination of CAB members and differing time zones, we have been unable to record this episode in time. The voices of lived experience of CAB members were instead gathered from members of Staffs CAN, a group that Nicola was able to gain access to through her work with Staffordshire University.

Reflecting on the NCCPE's criteria for a successful convening knowledge approach, the approach adopted for this project has aimed to:

- Draw on the **representativeness** of the diverse types of knowledge: The rapid literature review gathered a range of academic literature, reports, webinars and toolkits. The podcasts included a total of 10 people with a variety of experience of CABs. The survey received a small number of responses but provided guidance on the gaps in current

knowledge and therefore helped to shape the podcast themes. The survey and Encounter session indicated the need for the podcast episodes to include the voices of CAB members as well as facilitators and leads. One of the episodes is dedicated to the experiences of CAB members. The podcasts draw on the experiences of both global community of interest CABs and local geographical CABs, and cover research focused CAB and those with a wider institutional remit. This, however, is a pilot and therefore has limitations in the amount of knowledge and voices it can include at this early stage. Continuation of this approach in line with the Community Cast's guiding principles will extend the representation of knowledge over time.

- Be **useful** in terms of the value of knowledge produced and the impact it enables. The podcast episodes were informed by the Encounter session at the Engage Conference, the survey and rapid literature review. We ensured podcast episodes reflects the needs, interests and gaps in knowledge identified through these methods.

- Is **accessible and inclusive** of stakeholders (including different types of experts and users of knowledge): We have aimed to include a broad range of knowledge in this first pilot series. Listening to podcasts is becoming an increasingly popular way to consume media and knowledge. One person at the Encounter session said that they did not know where to look to find podcasts. We therefore recommend NCCPE promote the podcast through their existing networks to increase awareness and understanding of the relevance of the series to the audience's work.

- Is **value for money** in terms of the financial investment and capacity required and the impact on improving knowledge: Creating the podcast episodes in a way that reflects the practices and principles of CABs is more time consuming than taking a simple transactional approach. However, embedding participatory principles, such as those adopted by The Community Cast, has resulted in a more inclusive approach that have enabled more representative and diverse forms of knowledge being included.

Future Opportunities

Convening Knowledge about CABs has provided useful insight into how podcasting can help to gather knowledge in ways that are representative, inclusive, useful and value for money.

There are several opportunities for NCCPE to build on this work.

Creating a community around CABs

Many of the participant we spoke to welcomed the opportunity to have an accessible resource bank that would support development of future CABs. However, they were clear that a static platform that can become easily outdated would be less helpful than an interactive space where people can connect and contribute to the resources available.

It is recommended that NCCPE explore the opportunities and options for an online platform to network and share knowledge as part of their future Convening Knowledges commissions.

Utilising existing networks and contacts

The Community Cast had started to forge relationships with contacts across the UK and Canada. One of the planned podcast episodes was unable to be recorded due to time constraints, but the people contributing to the episode are willing to support this in the future.

With support from NCCPE this additional episode could be recorded and created in Autumn 2024.

Nicola Gratton and Adam Gratton

https://www.thecommunitycast.co.uk/

yourcommunitycast@gmail.com

The
Community
Cast

July 2024