



## Training child welfare citizen review panel members: A promising approach?

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### ABSTRACT

Citizen Review Panels (CRPs) are groups of volunteers mandated by United States federal law to examine policies, procedures, and practices of public (e.g., state) child welfare agencies, and make recommendations for systemic improvements. To date, several researchers have made clarion calls for training frameworks and approaches for CRP members. Despite the federal mandate, millions of dollars in resources allocated to these panels, and the potential to positively impact the child welfare system, no published training frameworks exist. This *brief* documents the evaluation of an online training for CRP members (N = 21) in one southeastern state. The training was developed based on needs identified in existing CRP literature, and delivered via an online learning platform. A pre-experimental (pre/post) approach was used to evaluate the training. Results indicate a significant improvement in knowledge associated with serving on the CRP, and overall, participants viewed the training as being positively impactful to their work as a CRP member. The brief will provide an overview of the training, evaluation approach, and briefly discuss salient implications derived from the results.

### 1. Introduction

An engaged citizenry has long been a desirable component of public child welfare programs (Kinney, 2008; Miller & Jones, 2015; Stivers, 1990). In the United States (U.S.), this participation has manifested via the development of child welfare Citizen Review Panels (CRPs). CRPs are groups of volunteers mandated by U.S. federal law to examine public (e.g., state) child welfare agencies. Specifically, CRPs review policies, procedures, and practices associated with the public child welfare system (U.S. Department for Health and Human Services, 2014). These reviews culminate with reports that make recommendations for systemic improvements.

Several studies have examined CRPs. The majority of these works have discussed the need for effective training initiatives and frameworks (e.g., Bryan, Jones, & Lawson, 2010; Jones, 2004; Jones & Royse, 2008; Miller, Collins-Camargo, & Jones, 2017; Miller, Collins-Camargo, Niu, & Jones, 2017; Miller & Jones, 2015). Despite these clarion calls related to training for CRP members, a comprehensive literature review revealed no published studies that explicitly examine training models for CRP members. This study seeks to address this limitation in the current literature.

This *brief* documents the evaluation of an online training for CRP members (N = 21) in one southeastern state. The training was developed based on needs identified in existing CRP literature, and delivered

via an online learning platform. Training modules focused on building member knowledge associated with CRPs. A pre-experimental (pre/post) approach was used to evaluate the training. After a brief review of literature, this brief will provide an overview of the training, explicate training results, and discuss salient implications derived from the training evaluation.

### 2. Background

#### 2.1. CRP overview

Citizen Review Panels (CRPs) are groups of citizen volunteers charged with evaluating the public child welfare system of the state in which they are formed (Kot, Bruner, & Scott, 1998). These groups were mandated via a 1996 reauthorization of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA; P.L. 104–235). This reauthorization focused on public oversight of state child welfare agencies. Thus, congress mandated that states seeking federal funds for child welfare services form CRPs (Collins, 1998). Per CAPTA, CRPs were to be formed and implemented by July 1999.

In essence, CRPs are to monitor state compliance with CAPTA, review child fatalities, and monitor Title IV-E (e.g., adoption/foster care) programs. As well, CRPs are able to select, review, and/or evaluate other aspects of the public child welfare system, as they see fit (Jones &

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Roysse, 2008). Based on this work, CRPs make recommendations, via an annual report, related to systemic improvements. In turn, per a 2003 reauthorization of CAPTA, called the Keeping Children and Families Safe Act (P.L. 108–36), states are required to respond to the written CRP report within six months. Today, CRPs have been implemented in all states and the District of Columbia (Miller & Jones, 2015).

## 2.2. CRP research

Despite the federal mandate associated with CRPs and the resources, financial and otherwise, allocated to these panels, there is sparse research related to CRPs (Collins-Camargo, Buckwalter, & Jones, 2016; Miller, Collins-Camargo, Niu, et al., 2017). Limitations notwithstanding, several researchers have examined various aspects of CRPs. Many of these studies have explored member perceptions related to CRP participation. For instance, in national studies, both Jones (2004) and Jones and Roysse (2008) found that CRP members reported a lack of communication and ambiguous goals as impediments to CRP work. Buckwalter (2014) made similar findings. In the most recent national examination of CRPs, Miller, Collins-Camargo, Niu, et al. (2017) concluded that members lack knowledge related to the federal mandate guiding their work. These authors also concluded that panels need to more effectively recruit and retain members representative of the communities in which the panels serve.

A common leitmotif in the current research literature is the need for training frameworks for CRP members. In fact, most of the published studies associated with CRPs have discussed the training needs of CRP members. Over a decade ago, Jones (2004) explicitly argued about the need for member training. In their national study related to CRPs, Jones and Roysse (2008) found that some participants reported needing “better training” related to CRPs (p. 155). Likewise, Bryan, Collins-Camargo, and Jones (2011) asserted that CRP members should be offered “more direct training and access to knowledge” (p. 618). Bryan, Jones, Allen, and Collins-Camargo (2007) called for trainings associated with developing knowledge about CRP members. These authors asserted that training for CRP members should be a “priority” for all stakeholders involved in CRP work (p. 1299). Both Jones, Litzelfelner, and Ford (2003) and Miller, Collins-Camargo, and Jones (2017) concluded that CRP training framework are needed to ensure that members have the requisite knowledge to effectively serve on the panels.

The implications derived from the literature are clear. Whilst the training needs of CRPs have been identified in the literature, there are very few, if any, published examinations of training models. If CRPs are to meet their full potential, training endeavors must be examined and results disseminated. This brief seeks to meet this limitation in the current child welfare CRP literature.

## 2.3. Training description

A workgroup developed the training for CRP members in one southeastern state. This workgroup included university researchers, the state CRP-liaison and two former CRP members with extensive CRP experience. The training is rooted in literature that identifies the training needs of CRP members (e.g., Jones & Roysse, 2008; Bryan et al., 2011; Miller, Collins-Camargo, & Jones, 2017).

These studies in mind, the training was designed to meet three distinct, yet interconnected goals: (1) Educate members about the federal mandates associated with CAPTA; (2) Familiarize CRP members with the kind of work that CRPs undertake; and, (3) Inform members of contemporary state-level child welfare issues (e.g., practices and policies) that may influence the work of the CRP.

The training was delivered via an online learning platform (OLP). Research suggests that online delivery may be ideal for volunteer groups (Cravens, 2001). The training was structured via four modules, conducive to meeting the afore-mentioned goals. Table 1 denotes each module and the overarching focus of the module.

## 2.4. Purpose of the evaluation

The evaluation of the training was guided by three (3) distinct queries: (1) Does participation in the initiative increase perceived member knowledge about CRPs; (2) Were CRP members satisfied with the training; and, (3) Did participants view the training as potentially impactful to the work of their panel? By answering these questions, and documenting processes associated with the training, this brief uniquely addresses limitations in the current literature.

## 3. Evaluation approach

### 3.1. Participants

All CRP members in this southeastern state were invited to participate in the training. Each participant was sent a link pertaining to the training and registered for the training via the OLP. Participation in the training was optional and participants were able to discontinue participation at any time. Twenty-one of the 29 CRP members completed the training.

A part of the training evaluation, CRP members who took part in the training did provide some basic demographic and general information. The typical member who completed the training was aged 46.33 (sd = 13.9), identified as Caucasian/White (n = 19) or African-American/Black (n = 2) and had served on the panel 2.27 years (sd = 3.1; Mdn = 1).

### 3.2. Method

Data were collected from each participant who took part in the training. Data were collected before participants started the training (e.g., pre-test) and again immediately upon completion of the training (post-test). Once collected, data were analyzed for the explicit purpose of answering the previously proposed evaluation queries.

### 3.3. Instrument

Based on a literature review on CRPs (Bryan et al., 2010; Jones et al., 2003; Jones & Roysse, 2008; Miller & Jones, 2015), the workgroup developed a questionnaire intended to collect primary data related to evaluating the training. The survey entailed three distinct sections and was piloted with a small group of former CRP members (n = 5) for item clarity and readability.

The sections of the survey are as follows:

(1) **CRP Knowledge.** To assess member knowledge associated with CRPs, the workgroup employed a knowledge subscale utilized in previous CRP research (see Miller, Collins-Camargo, Niu, et al., 2017). This subscale consists of five items designed to assess general knowledge related to CRPs, including the federal mandate (e.g., CAPTA) guiding the panels. Items are measured via Likert-type scale anchored at 1 with “Not knowledgeable” to 5 with “Very Knowledgeable.” An example item is as follows: *In general, how knowledgeable are you about the federal legislation mandating CRPs?* The knowledge score is comprised of the mean across all items.

(2) **Satisfaction with Training.** Satisfaction was measured using a five-item scale developed by the workgroup. Items in this scale were designed to measure the extent to which participants were satisfied with the training. Items were measured via Likert-type scale anchored at 1 with “Not at All” to 5 with “Extremely.” Items for this scale are included in Table 2.

(3) **Impact of Training on CRP Work.** Impact was measured via a three-item scale. Items in this scale were designed to measure the perceived impact of the training of CRP work. Items were measured via Likert-type scale anchored at 1 with “Not at All” to 5 with “Extremely.” As with the scale above, items for this scale are included in Table 2.

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