

Accountability Structures:

An accountability structure is the organizational framework that depicts the different groups within the partnership and includes an outline of the roles and responsibilities of each group, describing the processes, people, and supports necessary to function effectively. An accountability structure for a cradle to career partnership can be likened to an organizational chart for a company.

It is important to identify the different groups or committees that will be responsible for carrying out the roles or functions of a partnership. Some of the most common accountability structure groups are listed below. While not all of these groups are necessary to include in your structure, as it will depend on local context, there are three groups that are critical to every cradle to career partnership and do need to be included in the accountability structure: Backbone, Leadership Table, and Collaborative Action Networks.

Common Accountability Structure Groups:

- Backbone*
- Leadership Table*
- Collaborative Action Networks*
- Board of Directors
- Data Team
- Operations Council
- Steering Committee
- Support Council
- Advisory Committees

*Needed Accountability
Structure Groups

• How to Use this Resource:

The purpose of this resource is to provide a guide for partnership staff in addressing common challenges while building an accountability structure, particularly ensuring the structure is suited to meet local, contextual needs. It provides questions to consider when building your unique accountability structure to help ensure that the right leaders and community members are engaged and the right groups are convened to fit your local context and assets.

- **Audience:** core staff of a partnership or those tasked with developing an accountability structure for a partnership.
- **Resource organization:** the resource is organized topically regarding questions for a partnership to consider as they develop their structure. Topics addressed include the following:
 - Identifying the Right Partners and Utilizing their Capacity
 - Accommodating for the Scope of the Partnership
 - Authentically Engaging the Community
 - Building in Diversity and Equity
 - Determining the Right Accountability Structure Groups for Local Context

• Additional Resource:

For more information on developing an accountability structure, view the [Building an Accountability Structure Toolkit](#)

Identifying the Right Leaders

Are all of the necessary sectors represented on the leadership table including early childhood, civic/government, community-based organizations, K-12 school district(s), philanthropy, business and higher education?*

YES

Go to next question.

NO

***TOA requirement:** Early childhood, K-12, higher education, philanthropy, civic/government, community-based organizations and business sectors are required to be represented somewhere within the accountability structure of the partnership.

Additional resource: The **accountability structure toolkit** may help provide an in-depth understanding of the accountability structure and where different partners could play a potential role

Are some partners potentially overextended (e.g. the same person has been tapped for multiple roles) and/or others underutilized?

YES

Additional question: Are there other sector representatives that could diversify the representation?

Potential Task: Analyze the commitment partners have made in terms of time, staff and interest.

Rural partnerships may struggle with this in particular as there are less partners available to tap to fill roles in the partnership.

NO

Go to next question.

Have you worked with partners in the accountability structure to identify a process to formalize the work together (e.g. bylaws, MOUs, partnership agreement, etc.)?

YES

Potential Task: Have the partnership further analyze the commitment partners have made in terms of time, staff and interest.

Additional question: Have you considered **decision making processes** to be adopted within the various

NO

Additional resources: You may want to look through overviews of **MOUs, bylaws** and **an example of a partnership agreement** to decide what model might work best for your partnership.

Accommodating for the Scope of the Partnership

Based on the numbers of partners involved in the work of the partnership, are there individuals and/or organizations who are under- or over-utilized within the structure?

YES

Additional question: Are the roles and responsibilities clear for members participating in various partnership groups?

NO

Additional question: If there are too many, are the roles and responsibilities of any of the groups duplicated in another? Can any tables be combined?

Additional question: If there are not enough, are there any gaps in meeting the **backbone function** of a partnership that are not included in any structure groups as of yet?

Authentically Engaging the Community

Have you considered what the functional role will be of community members within their accountability structure?

YES

Additional question: Does the role of the community align with the actual responsibilities given within the accountability structure?

For example, if the role is decision-maker but the leadership group makes the majority of partnership decisions, are there community members represented on the leadership group?

Potential Task: Review this role with additional community members or organizations with authentic community ties to provide feedback.

NO

Potential Task: Consider potential community members or organizations with authentic community ties that could be utilized within the accountability structure.

Additional resource: When considering the role of community, you may want to review the **community engagement continuum** to understand in what capacity the community can be utilized (i.e. transactional, transitional or transformational) throughout the structure.

Additional resource: You may want to review the 10 principles of community engagement even if community members are engaged in the accountability structure as it can help when considering how to engage authentically and sustainably.

Building in Diversity and Equity

Does the accountability structure reflect the diverse members of your community and the students served by the partnership?

YES

Additional question: Are these communities able to participate fully and authentically in the work(e.g. translation needs, familiarity with the process)?

Additional question: Are there multiple members of these communities represented to provide multiple perspectives rather than just one?

For example, there are multiple persons of color representing multiple communities integrated throughout the accountability structure as opposed to having one representative acting as the voice for multiple communities.

NO

Potential Task: Identify both formal and informal leaders from these communities to play an early and authentic role in the work of the partnership.

Potential Task: Review data and stories by historically underserved communities regarding their educational experiences and share among partners.

Additional question: Hearing from the perspectives of these leaders and keeping in mind data and stories, how can these communities be authentically integrated in the partnership accountability structure?

Is addressing equity a priority within accountability structure groups?

YES

Additional question: Are the roles and responsibilities of the groups strong enough to ensure sustained focus on equity?

Additional question: Are these efforts potentially adequate to lead to behavior change and eventually educational equity?

Additional question: Are there major organizations or players who are integral in addressing equity missing?

NO

Potential Task: Identify major organizations or players integral in addressing equity and where they are or could be integrated into the accountability structure.

Determining the Right Accountability Structure Groups for Local Context

If considering developing a steering committee, operations team, data team or support council, consider the following questions:*

Reminder: in order to progress through the Theory of Action gateways, partnerships must have a leadership table, collaborative action networks and a **backbone structure (view the link for the toolkit).*

Steering committee: Smaller subset of the leadership table that acts as advisory group, providing guidance on key issues of the partnership and meeting more frequently than the leadership table. It may be that the leadership table by itself is enough to guide the partnership or it may be the leadership group is too large and/or meets too infrequently to keep progress moving forward at an appropriate pace.

- How frequently can the leadership table meet?
 - Will additional guidance on partnership strategies be needed outside of the leadership table?
 - Are a core set of leaders committed to meeting more often than the full leadership table?
 - How large is your leadership table?
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Operations council: Coordinates the needs of the collaborative action networks with the support groups (e.g. data team, communications, etc.) and provides a communication link to the leadership table regarding the work of the networks.

- Will an additional internal link be needed to share / communicate work across the partnership?
 - Will additional coordination be needed to garner necessary support for the collaborative action networks?
 - What capacity and expertise is available both from partnership staff as well as the leadership table? Is additional support needed?
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Data team: Group with expertise in data analysis or ownership of data who come together to provide support for data needs of the partnership around defining partnership outcomes and indicators, working with the Data Manager to develop the report card and providing data analysis for networks.

- Are there organizations and/or individuals with significant expertise in data analysis and/or local measurements?
- Will additional expertise be needed in order for the partnership to select outcomes and their indicators?

- Will capacity be needed outside of partnership staff to support the data analysis needs of the collaborative action networks?
 - Is there significant overlap between expertise in outcome selection and specific data analysis for collaborative action networks (is there potential need for multiple groups)?
 - Is there an acute collective need to get the work off the ground (e.g. selecting outcomes and indicators)?
 - Is there a need for data capacity to provide analysis support over time?
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Support council: Convenes around an outcome to identify the process for convening a collaborative action network, frame the work, narrow the focus of a network and provide ongoing support by advocating on behalf of the network. Most often seen in partnership with a larger geographic scope.

- Is the scope of your partnership broad enough that additional capacity is needed to scope the focus of the collaborative action networks and frame their work?
 - Will additional guidance be needed to support the convening of the collaborative action networks?
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Advisory committee(s): Can provide additional advisory role in support various functions of the partnership including equity, communications or community engagement.

- Are there particular functions of the partnership where trust will need to be built? For example, have there been past difficulties with authentic community engagement where it may help to have additional voices and expertise?
 - Is there a partnership function where core staff feel extra help may be needed in order to meet expectations?
 - Is there a particular area where partners may be able to provide a lot of expertise?
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Board of directors: Only necessary for partnerships which function as a separate 501(c)3 organization.

- How are the roles of the board and the leadership group different?
- Does the leadership group have significant control in the partnership direction or is the board of directors involved with this level of decision-making?