Building an ACCOUNTABILITY Structure

Strive
Every child. Cradle to career.

Getting Started Playbook:

To support the launch of the Theory of Action, Strive is building a 'Getting Started Playbook' focusing on helping communities meet the key benchmarks in the Exploring Gateway. This playbook will be made up of individual toolkits and resources focused on specific topics within the quality benchmarks, but are linked together to create a comprehensive guide on how to effectively get some of the beginning pieces of this work in place.

The first toolkit within the playbook is the Building an Accountability Structure Toolkit which aims to help Network members:

- Understand the importance of an accountability structure
- View different types of structures and their respective advantages and disadvantages
- Understand and outline the roles and responsibilities that need to be accommodated in a structure
- Clarify the decision making roles of different groups in the accountability structure
- Develop necessary agreements that need to be in place to operationalize an accountability structure
- Create an accountability structure that fits their partnership's needs and context.

Look-out for the next pieces in the 'Getting Started Playbook'!

-The Strive Team

Thank You...

A special thanks to all of the communities who shared their stories and examples in this toolkit:

- All Hands Raised
- Aspire
- Big Goal Collaborative
- Commit! Dallas
- Milwaukee Succeeds
- Mission: Graduate
- Raise DC
- The Learning Network
- The Strive Partnership
- Thrive Chicago
- Treasure Valley Education Partnership
- Waterbury Bridge to Success

We are working collectively to build the knowledge and expertise in this field and we couldn't do this without you!

Thank you to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Metlife Foundation for their support that helped us develop the Building an Accountability Structure Toolkit.

Click on the sections below to be taken right to this section

Building an Accountability Structure

What is an Accountability Structure?

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.

Why is it important?

Accountability structures provide:

- **Clarity**
  - Around roles & responsibilities
  - Around decision making and authority
- **Organization**
  - Organizes the work to improve effectiveness and efficiency
  - Outlines an organized work-flow
- **Communication**
  - Visual of what a cradle to career partnership looks like

VIEW EXAMPLE ACCOUNTABILITY STRUCTURES:

- Treasure Valley Education Partnership
- The Learning Network
- Milwaukee Succeeds

Something to Think About...

Building in Community Voice & Diversity

Designing an accountability structure provides a unique opportunity to build community voice and diversity into the structure of the partnership. Cradle to career partnerships have built in community voice in different ways including the intentional inclusion of a community leader at the leadership table. A leadership table is a group of cross-sector, executive-level leaders that participate in the direction setting of the partnership. This allows for a representative of the community to be involved in decision-making and strategic direction setting of a partnership.

Diversity (including sector representation, ethnic make-up, levels of authority, etc.) can also be intentionally incorporated into an accountability structure by clearly outlining the make-up of different groups. Within the leadership table, a diversity of sectors is required to ensure that view points from all the key community sectors are adequately represented. This cross-sector requirement is often clearly written into the description and role of the leadership table to ensure the intended diversity is achieved.

Partnership Roles:

A cradle to career partnership consists of organizations, systems, and stakeholders who come together to jointly improve outcomes for children in their community. The type of systems change work that a cradle to career partnership aims to achieve requires a diverse set of players and strategies to truly have impact. Understanding the different roles and responsibilities that these different partners and the partnership plays in advancing a cradle to career community effort is extremely important when developing an accountability structure as well as when communicating what the partnership is and does. Outlined below is a list of roles and responsibilities of the partnership that should be incorporated into the various groups within the partnership's accountability structure.

ROLES

Change practice on ground - Implement data-driven improvements identified in the action plan

Convene partners - Bring together the necessary community partners to support the work

Data access - Enables necessary data that is crucial to advancing the work of the partnership to be accessed and used for data-driven decision making

Data analysis - Analyze data according to the partnership's needs

Data coaching -Train and support partnership and network members in the process of using data for continuous improvement

Development/fundraising - Secure funding and resources necessary to advance the partnership's work

External communication – Develop a set of key messages about the partnership and communicate messages regularly to the broad community; develop the necessary mechanisms for communicating about the partnership (newsletter, website, etc.)

Focus on eliminating disparities - Ensure the work of the partnership stays focused on narrowing the gap of achievement between various groups of students

House the partnership staff- Provide office space, technology needs and meeting space for partnership staff

Implement strategies to impact outcomes - Implement data-driven strategies identified in the action plan to impact an outcome and continuously monitor and improve those strategies

Internal communications - Enable the flow of information between the different groups within the partnership

Personnel support - Support the salaries of new employees or loan existing employees to staff the partnership

Remove financial barriers - Actively work to overcome identified financial barriers that inhibit the advancement of this work

Remove operational barriers - Work to eliminate identified operational barriers that inhibit the advancement of this work

Remove political barriers & advocate for policy change - Actively work to disarm and eliminate identified political barriers that inhibit the advancement of this work

Represent/engage community voice - Engages and incorporates community ideas and suggestions in the work of the partnership

Resource support for data-driven action - Provide financial or in-kind support to enable the implementation of data-driven activities and strategies

Strategic decision making - Makes decisions on the strategic direction and mission of the partnership

ROLES ▲

Something to Think About...

Capacity from External Partners

The above list outlines many of the typical roles that we see partnerships incorporate into the roles & responsibilities of different groups within the accountability structure. The actual list of roles that your partnership will play largely depends on the existing community assets and resources available to the partnership. For instance, many cradle to career partnerships play the role of removing political barriers and advocating for policy change, however in your community there might already be an organization or entity focused on policy change or reform that is better positioned to take on this role. It is important to build upon the assets that already exist in the community when identifying the roles the partnership will need to play. Identifying this external capacity will help you determine the necessary groups that need to be convened within the partnership.

Partnership Groups:

After defining the various roles of a partnership, it is important to identify the group or committee that will be responsible for carrying out those roles. 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 five groups that are critical to every cradle to career partnership and do need to be included in the accountability structure: **Anchor Entity**, **Leadership Table**, **Backbone Staff**, **Collaborative Action Networks**, and a **Data Team**.

Anchor Entity:

A neutral convener of partners that has a respectable reputation in the community to be able to bring together key leaders, work with existing organizations, build strong relationships, commit to using data to drive focus, and has the capacity to support the staffing and operational roles of the partnership. The anchor entity often commits to housing the partnership staff and ensuring long term stability, specifically through committing resources and convening partners.

Typical Roles: housing the partnership, personnel support, convene partners, external communication

Selecting the Right Anchor

Anchor Entity	Pros	Cons
Universities	Strong convening and research capabilities	Challenging bureaucracy, can be high cost
United Ways	Existing community building and fund raising capabilities	Can be perceived as non-neutral; partners may expect funding
Community Foundations	Strong fund raising and convening capabilities	Partners may expect funding, some less willing to share negative information with a funder
Government	Strongest convening capabilities, ability to leverage public funds	Challenging bureaucracy, political transitions can stall the effort
Existing Nonprofit	Closest to the on the ground work, potentially more rooted in the community, credibility	Can be perceived as non-neutral, may be more limited in their scope of influence,
New Nonprofit	Perceived neutrality as a new organization; less community-baggage	Potential to compete or be perceived as competing with other non-profits for funding, initially resource intensive, potential lack of long-term funding

Adapted from 'Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work'
by Fay Hanleybrown, John Kania, & Mark Kramer

"Raise DC, the cradle to career initiative in Washington DC, was originally convened by the mayor's office to ensure all District youth are provided the opportunity for success from cradle to career. After reviewing previous community partnership efforts in DC, Raise DC came to better understand the importance of an anchor entity to their success and sustainability. The partnership then drafted criteria based on the practices of other cradle to career partnerships across the country, and examined the types of anchor entities that support these partnerships. After finalizing their criteria and vetting their options, the Executive Team engaged in follow-up meetings with perspective candidates and field experts. This process allowed the Raise DC Executive Team to achieve consensus in naming the Community Foundation for the National Capital Region (CFNCR) as the partnership's anchor."

View Raise DC's Structure

Backbone Staff:

A group of individuals who manage the everyday operations of the partnership

- **Project Director:** A full-time dedicated staff person that provides leadership and management to ensure that the mission and core values of the partnership are put into practice
- **Data Manager:** supports analysis, management, integration, and reporting of data
- **Communications/Community Engagement Manager:** supports internal and external communications and engagement of the broader community
- **Network Facilitator:** supports continuous improvement action planning; data coach

Typical Roles: convene partners, remove operational barriers, internal communications, data access, data analysis, data coaching, external communications, development/fundraising, focus on eliminating disparities

"When Commit! Dallas was established as the anchor entity to support the work of building a cradle to career partnership in Dallas County, TX, the partnership table prioritized getting the right staffing model in place. Serving as a backbone for hundreds of early childhood providers, 15 school districts, 21 higher education institutes, and hundreds of nonprofits, Commit! has an expansive scope and has mobilized a staff to support this scope. Commit! now has a full team of full- and part-time staff, as well as respected community volunteers to supplement paid positions. Upfront, the partnership table recognized the importance of having an Executive Director capable of connecting with and convening partners and a Data Analyst who could help build a compelling case for the work."

View Commit!'s Structure

Leadership Table:

A group of cross-sector, executive-level leaders from education (including early childhood, k-12, and post-secondary), non-profit, philanthropic, business, civic, faith-based, and community organizations that participate in the direction setting of the partnership. (Also called executive council/committee).

Typical Roles: convene partners, strategic decision making, remove political barriers, remove financial barriers, remove operational barriers, focus on eliminating disparities

Building the Leadership Table

"Milwaukee Succeeds is a collaborative effort to unite the community around a common vision: bringing about lasting change to the way education works for children in Milwaukee. This vision was established by the Milwaukee Succeeds Community Leadership Council, which continues to embrace and advocate for this vision as they lead the work forward. The Community Leadership Council members represent the top level decision-makers in their organizations and bring their leadership and influence to the shared effort to improve the partnership's community-level outcomes. The Community Leadership Council meets quarterly where they work to promote collaborative continuous improvement, overcome barriers to aligning resources, and advocate for funding."

View Milwaukee Succeeds's Structure

Board of Directors:

A group of individuals who jointly oversee the work of the partnership. This is often a necessary component of a partnership that is a 501c3.

Typical Roles: strategic decision making

"All Hands Raised, the cradle to career partnership in Portland/Multnomah County, Oregon began as Portland Public Schools Foundation and later expanded its work from a fundraising focus within one school district to also include an equity and collaboration focus across six school districts through a community effort to increase graduation rates known as 'Connected by 25'. This laid the platform for the organization to be selected by school and community leaders as the strongest potential backbone for a county-wide effort to align the community with the goal of improving educational outcomes from cradle to career. All Hands Raised's history and its independent 501c3 status helped to shape its current structure including the existence of a Board of Directors. The Board of Directors repurposed and expanded its role and responsibilities for this new initiative, while remaining committed to its historic role of supporting parent-led fundraising in Portland Public Schools. Currently, this Board is a diverse cross-section of leaders from throughout the partnership's geographic scope and is responsible for clearly and concisely defining the mission, direction, goals, and objectives of All Hands Raised, as well as providing fiscal oversight and governance for the organization. The strong organizational governance role played by the Board allows All Hands Raised to convene a broader executive-level advisory Council focused exclusively on aligning organizations, strategies and influence in the community to advance the goals of the partnership; the Council is comprised of superintendents, corporate and nonprofit CEO's, university and community college presidents, the mayor, the county chair, and other community leaders."

View All Hands Raised's Structure

Steering Committee:

A smaller subset of the leadership table that acts as an advisory group, providing guidance on key issues of the partnership and meeting more frequently than the leadership table.

Typical Roles: strategic decision making, remove political barriers, remove operational barriers, focus on eliminating disparities, represent/engage community voice

"Commit! Dallas is a cradle to career partnership dedicated to helping Dallas County kids realize their full potential. Part of this independent non-profit's original structure was a steering council that consisted of cross-sector leaders that drove strategy during Commit!'s founding year. This group met 5-6 times annually as needed and collectively agreed on the 11 academic outcomes around which the Commit! partnership is oriented. Within a year of regularly convening, the steering council evolved into the leadership council, a larger body of cross-sector institutions across the region represented by their respective executive directors. Convening quarterly, they effectively serve as the governing board of Commit! by driving strategy and pulling their authority and influence to broker resources to implement strategy. The diversity of C-level leaders in the room allows for strong collaboration amongst multiple districts, businesses, foundations and higher education institutions."

View Commit!'s Structure

Operations Council:

Coordinates the needs of the collaborative action networks with the support groups (data team, communications, facilitators) and provides a communication link to the leadership table regarding the work of the collaborative action networks and progress towards improving an outcome. The composition of the operations council usually consists of the deputy or right hand person of a member of the leadership table (i.e. the vice president of an organization might be on the operations council, while the president is on the leadership table).

Typical Roles: remove operational barriers, internal communications, resource support for data-driven action

"Milwaukee Succeeds is a collaborative effort launched in the summer of 2011 to unite the community around a common vision: bringing about lasting change to the way education works for children in Milwaukee. The partnership formed an Executive Committee to guide the work and direction, as well as Strategy Network Teams to identify and implement data-driven strategies. Milwaukee Succeeds also recognized the need for a group that would support the needs of the Strategy Network Teams while providing a communication link to the Executive Committee and thus created the Operations Team. The Milwaukee Succeeds Operations Team meets monthly to provide recommendations for process and strategy to the Executive Committee. The Operations Team also drives the implementation and oversight of the network teams by connecting them to the necessary resources and tools to carry out their strategies."

View Milwaukee Succeeds's Structure

Support Council:

Committee that convenes around an outcome to identify the process for convening a collaborative action network, frame the work, narrow the focus of a collaborative action network, and provide ongoing support by advocating on behalf of the collaborative action network when needs are identified.

Typical Roles: remove operational barriers, internal communications

"Mission: Graduate is a cradle-to-career education partnership in Central New Mexico serving over 200,000 children with a particular focus on increasing post-secondary degree and credential attainment by 2020. Strategies to support their work across the educational continuum are determined by Collaborative Action Networks through the use of data, but Mission: Graduate also provides other opportunities for different levels of engagement by community stakeholders. To that end, Mission: Graduate is also planning to employ Community Support Councils to help frame and align the work. Community Support Councils will consist of key community stakeholders, including: parents and families, youth, educators, business owners, faith-based organizations, nonprofits, and voluntary organizations. These Community Support Councils will help frame the work of the Networks with recommendations on Priority Strategies and provide on-going support for the Collaborative Action Networks by ensuring that each action plan developed by the networks: (1) addresses the needs of the community, (2) leverages existing assets, and (3) represents the interests of community stakeholders. Community Support Councils will also work with the partnership's Vision Council and Collaborative Action Networks to support policy advocacy and to mobilize key stakeholders, as needed. Mission: Graduate's Community Support Councils will meet no more than once per month, and most councils will be convened on an ad hoc basis at the discretion of the partnership's Operations Team."

View Mission: Graduate's Structure

Collaborative Action Networks:

Groups of appropriate cross-sector practitioners and individuals who organize around a community level outcome and use a continuous improvement process to develop a charter and action plan with strategies to improve that outcome.

Typical Roles: implement strategies to impact outcomes, change practice on ground

“In Raise DC, Washington DC’s cradle to career partnership, “change networks” are the collaborative action networks responsible for: 1) Identifying initial contributing indicators and committing to integrating these indicators into individual program performance tracking; 2) Identifying successful strategies and committing to integrating into individual programs; and 3) Communicating progress, barriers, and opportunities to the leadership council. The roles of the partnership and the change network were outlined in a value exchange that articulated the supports of the partnership, including hands-on facilitation, training and technical assistance, and expectations of the network, including developing and implementing a shared action plan to improve an outcome and sharing relevant program data and expertise to support the action plan.”

View Raise DC’s Structure

Data Team:

A group of individuals with expertise in data analysis or ownership of data who come together to provide support for the data needs of the partnership. The work can be divided into two clear roles: (1) defining the partnerships outcomes and indicators, working with the Data Manager to develop the report card, and providing data analysis to the collaborative action networks; and (2) supporting the networks with data analysis. Depending on the make-up of the data team and the type of external data resources available, partnerships have accommodated these two roles within a single data team or have had different teams responsible for the different roles.

Typical Roles: data access, data analysis, data coaching, external communication

“Thrive Chicago is a cradle to career partnership working to ensure all Chicagoans enjoy success in education, career, and life. Realizing the important role that data plays in this work, Thrive Chicago convened a Data Team to define measures for a baseline report and data dashboard, support continuous quality improvement, and periodically revisit indicators to revise as necessary. The partnership’s Data Team consists of local researchers, data owners, and other data experts.”

Advisory Committees:

Groups of individuals whom are engaged to provide input and direction around a specific aspect of the work or provide a necessary perspective to the work as a whole. Advisory committees can focus on specific groups like community, parents, policy, and funders group and their focused engagement is often time-bound.

Community Advisory Committee:

Group of community members and stakeholders who provide input and direction on the work of the partnership and act as ambassadors of the partnership to the broader community.

Typical Roles: represent/engage community voice, strategic decision making

> "The Treasure Valley Education Partnership (TVEP) convened nearly 200 individuals from across the region to participate in the partnership's Design Institute. This group helped shape the vision for a continuum of education in the region, and also helped define outcomes critical to students' success, develop a structure to implement the work, and prioritize the areas for initial focus. The Design Institute group and broader community continue to be engaged in the partnership as part of the TVEP Advisory Group, which meets quarterly to learn more about the work and discuss critical issues. This group is open to all community members with an interest in education and provides feedback and input to the Core Leadership Team."

View Treasure Valley Education Partnership's Structure

Equity Team:

Group of individuals who ensure the work of the partnership stays focused on narrowing the gap of achievement between various groups of students.

Typical Roles: focus on eliminating disparities

> "All Hands Raised is the cradle to career partnership in Portland/Multnomah County, Oregon. The leadership Council of the partnership selected equity, with a specific focus on racial equity, as the top priority of the overall partnership. In doing so they placed racial equity at the center of the agenda for all of the partnership's component groups. The leading edge of that effort is the Eliminating Disparities in Child & Youth Success Collaborative, which brings six superintendents together monthly with leaders from within communities of color, as well as other partners. The Collaborative utilizes continuous improvement principles to advance systemic and policy level changes within each district and partner organization that hold the strongest potential to close the racial opportunity gap in a real and lasting way."

View All Hands Raised's Structure

Communications Team:

Group of individuals who manage messaging, internal and external communication, and marketing to effectively communicate the work and progress of the partnership.

Typical Roles: external communications, internal communications

"The Big Goal Collaborative is a cradle to career partnership working to improve educational and career outcomes for children and adults in Northeast Indiana, with an overarching goal of increasing the number of residents in the region with a high quality degree or credential to 60% by the year 2025. With a geographic scope encompassing 10 counties, the partnership has convened Support Teams to provide internal guidance to the Big Goal Collaborative by guiding operations and determining accountability, as well as determining which strategies can be measured in a data-driven environment. One of these support teams included a Communications Team, which was charged with handling all communications for the partnership. This included messaging, future promotional materials, and maintaining an online presence. This team was integral in advising internal staff on initial messaging of the partnership in key publications like developing a one-pager. Now that initial messaging and communication direction has been set, the roles of the communications team have been assumed by an internal marketing team provided by the Big Goal Collaborative's anchor entity: the Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership."

View The Big Goal's Structure

Putting it Together...

Once the necessary roles and groups for your partnership have been identified, you can organize which groups are responsible for which roles by creating a simple chart. This chart can help easily identify where duplication or gaps in roles exists. In areas where multiple groups are responsible for the same role (i.e. both the data team and backbone staff are responsible for data access), special attention needs to be paid to ensure a clear communication and work-flow exists.

EXAMPLE

Groups	Roles
Anchor Entity	House the partnership; Personnel support; Convene partners; External communication
Leadership Table	Resource support for backbone; Resource support for data-driven action; Convene partners; Strategic decision making; Remove political barriers; Remove financial barriers; Focus on eliminating disparities
Backbone Staff	Internal communications; Data access; Data analysis; Data coaching; Remove operational barriers; Development/Fundraising;
Operations Council	Remove operational barriers; Internal communications; Resource support for data-driven action
Community Advisory Committee	Strategic decision making; Represent/Engage community voice; Focus on eliminating disparities
Collaborative Action Networks	Change practice on ground; Implement strategies to impact outcomes
Data Team	Data access; Data analysis; Data coaching

Work-Flows & Communications

Once the necessary groups in the accountability structure are identified and their roles are outlined, it is important to think about the different types of authority and decision making that will be performed at each group as well as how information from each group will be communicated across the partnership. Adapted from the RAPID methodology developed by Bain & Company, Strive has outlined four major decision making roles for groups within the accountability structure. Detailing the decision making roles for specific types of decisions helps clarify the role and authority within that role for each group as well as start to outline the work-flow within the partnership.

- **Decide:** determine the action to be taken or the decision to be made
- **Approve:** final authority on a decision or action, support/agreement is needed from this group to take action
- **Input:** consultation is needed from this group before decisions are made
- **Execute:** carries out the action once decision is made and approved

TYPES OF DECISIONS

There are many different types of decisions that will need to be made within a cradle to career partnership. The below categories encompass many of the types of these decisions. Combining the type of decision with the decision making role for a group within the accountability structure helps provide necessary clarity around work-flows.

- **Operational Financial Decisions:**

  Example: If the partnership needs to bring on additional capacity in terms of staff or consultants- who makes the decision on whether the partnership can financially support added capacity? Who needs to approve the decision? Whose input needs to be considered? Who executes the decision?

- **Strategic Direction Decisions:**

  Example: A new year's worth of data comes in showing needed support and action around third grade reading and high school graduation. The partnership only has the capacity to take on additional work around one outcome area- who makes the strategic decision on where the partnership should focus its limited resources and efforts? Who needs to approve the decision? Whose input needs to be considered? Who executes the decision?

- **Resource Allocation Decisions:**

  Example: Allocating Time Resources: Community interest in the partnership has spurred community members to devote their time to further the work of the partnership- who makes the decision on how to best utilize the time of these volunteers? Who needs to approve the decision? Whose input needs to be considered? Who executes the decision?

  Example: Allocating Talent Resources: A major corporation wants to support the partnership by providing in-kind continuous improvement expertise and services- who makes the decision on how these talent resources are allocated within the partnership? Who needs to approve the decision? Whose input needs to be considered? Who executes the decision?

  Example: Allocating Treasure Resources: A major funder in the community supports the partnership's vision and wants to align their funding practices to the partnership priorities. They partner with the partnership to serve as the fiscal agent of a pass-through grant that the partnership can award to organizations or collaborative action networks as they see appropriate to support the work. Who is involved in deciding how the grant money is allocated within the partnership? Who needs to approve the decision? Whose input needs to be considered? Who executes the decision?

- **Messaging/Communications Decisions:**

  Example: The third grade reading test scores, the indicator for the partnership's early reading outcome, have dropped significantly from last year to the current year and the district partners are worried the release of the partnership's report card will spur negative backlash at the districts- who decides the appropriate messaging and communications for the partnership and partners? Who needs to approve the decision? Whose input needs to be considered? Who executes the decision?

- **On the Ground Action Decisions:**

  Example: A collaborative action network is convened around college enrollment, one of the partnership's community level outcomes, and use local data to find that FAFSA completion, which is low in the community is also a big predictor of college enrollment- who identifies what specific strategies should be taken by the collaborative action network to improve college enrollment rates? Who needs to approve the decision? Whose input needs to be considered? Who executes the decision?

Putting it Together...

Using the chart created to match up roles with the groups, adding the decision making roles that each group has for the different types of decisions is a helpful way to start mapping out communication and work-flows.

Identifying the make-up of a group is also a great way to start thinking about communication flows. Is the operations council a subset of members from the leadership table? Should a member of the data team be involved in a collaborative action network to ensure communication flows easily between the two groups? This information will also be helpful in visually depicting your structure.

Example Decision Work-Flow

Decision: Deciding on Community Level Outcomes/Indicators (strategic)
The data team has identified a list of potential community level outcomes and identified available indicator data points and sources of data to measure each one (input). The backbone staff reviews the list and determines if any of the indicators are impractical or impossible to measure or collect (input). The list with the data team and backbone staff recommendations and comments is submitted to the community advisory committee to identify what outcomes and indicators resonate with the community (input). The backbone staff collects the feedback and makes a final recommendation with all of the input to the leadership table. The leadership table decides what outcomes and indicators the partnership will track (deision). The data team collects and communicates data for the final list of outcomes and indicators in the partnership's annual report card (executes).

EXAMPLE

Groups	Roles	Decision Making
Anchor Entity	House the Partnership; Personnel support; Convene partners; External communication	Financial (operations)- Approval
Leadership Council	Resource support for backbone; Resource support for data-driven action; Convene partners; Strategic decision making; Remove political barriers; Remove financial barriers; Focus on eliminating disparities	Financial (operations) - Decider Strategic- Decider On-the-ground action- Approval Resource allocation- Decider Messaging/communications- Input
Backbone Staff	Internal communications; Data access; Data analysis; Data coaching; Remove operational barriers; Development/ fundraising;	Resource allocation- Input Financial (operations)- Input Strategic- Input Messaging/communications- Decider; Executor
Operations Council	Remove operational barriers; Internal communications; Resource support for data-driven action	Messaging/communications- Input Resource allocation- Executor
Community Advisory Committee	Strategic decision making; Represent/engage community voice; Focus on eliminating disparities	Strategic- Input Messaging/communications- Executor
Collaborative Action Networks	Change practice on ground; Implement strategies to impact outcomes	On-the-ground-action- Decider, Executor Resource allocation (CI support)- Input
Data Team	Data access; Data analysis; Data coaching	Strategic- Input On-the-ground action- Input Resource allocation- Input

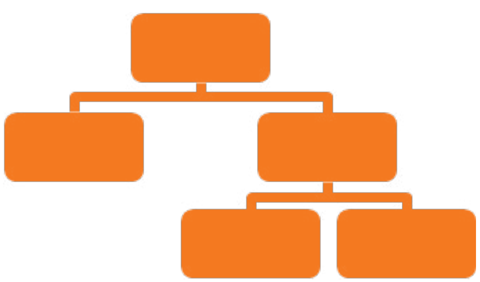
Accountability Structure Design:

Codifying the outline of groups, roles, and decision making into a visual structure is extremely helpful for communicating who the partnership is and what it does as well as further clarifying the roles and interactions between groups. The actual design of the structure also has communication implications for how the partnership is perceived.

Choosing a design depends entirely on the local context of your community and what your partners will respond well to. Things to consider when deciding on an accountability structure design include:

- **Communication:** How are you going to communicate about the partnership? What visuals do you know the partners respond well to? What type of visual might partners already be familiar with?
- **Contextual Sensitivities:** Does your community have a history of resisting initiatives that feel top-down?
- **Clarity:** Do partners struggle with a lack of clarity around their individual roles? Do partners struggle with a lack of clarity around interactions between different teams or groups?

Two major design archetypes:



Hierarchical

Concentric

Hub & Spokes:

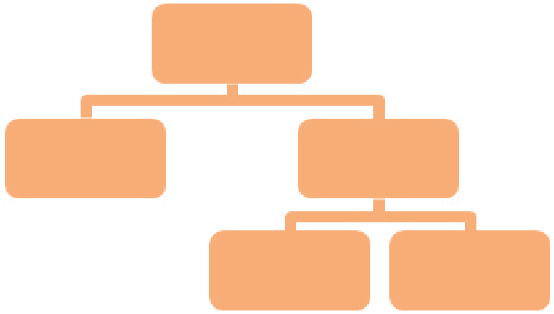
Some communities choose to use a hub & spokes structure to organize the work in their communities. A hub & spokes structure is a heavily centralized structure in which one central node (consisting of one or multiple groups) feeds smaller subsequent spokes (consisting of one or multiple groups). Communities with large geographic scopes or existing Promise Neighborhoods initiatives often find this structure helpful in organizing a group of smaller place-based efforts.

This method of organizing can be a challenge as a lack of communication across the partnership can occur, sometimes resulting in duplication of efforts or siloed efforts within the 'spokes.'

When organized as a hub & spokes structure, the two main design archetypes still apply: hierarchical and concentric. It is likely that there will be a overall structure that includes the hub & spokes, as well as a more detailed structure outlining the different groups of an individual spoke. The design of these two structures could be one of the archetypes (i.e. both the hub and individual spokes have a hierarchical structure) or both (hub has hierarchical structure while the spokes have a concentric structure).

Hierarchical Structure:

A hierarchical structure is an organizational structure in which all of the groups except one are subordinate to another group. The hierarchy usually consists of a singular/group of power at the top with subsequent levels of power beneath them.



Pros:

-Clear visual of accountability and authority
-Clear organization of work-flow
-Commonly used design, familiarity

Cons:

-Can be perceived as 'top-down'
-Could be considered bureaucratic
-Rigid, not organic

Story: *Mission: Graduate*

"Mission: Graduate is a cradle-to-career education partnership in central New Mexico serving over 200,000 children, paying special attention to increasing the number of graduates with college degrees and credentials in central New Mexico by 60,000 by the year 2020. In January 2013, Mission: Graduate convened a core group of CEO-level business leaders, university and educational leaders, government officials, and community members to engage in collective impact work around education. The partnership has expanded beyond this core group of leaders and developed an accountability structure to organize the different groups that are necessary to drive the work forward. This accountability structure includes a vision council, operations team, community support councils, and collaborative action networks. These different groups are organized into a network-based structure in order to ensure continuity of communication across groups and a clear delineation of role and responsibilities among different members of the partnership.

Mission: Graduate's vision council is a high-level leadership group that meets quarterly to help set the overall vision for the partnership, make recommendations about strategy, and advocate to funders, policy makers, and the public at large. This group is composed of CEO-level, cross-sector leaders who are in positions to aid in aligning partnership efforts. This group is also responsible for publicly communicating the work to the greater community and engaging key stakeholders in the process.

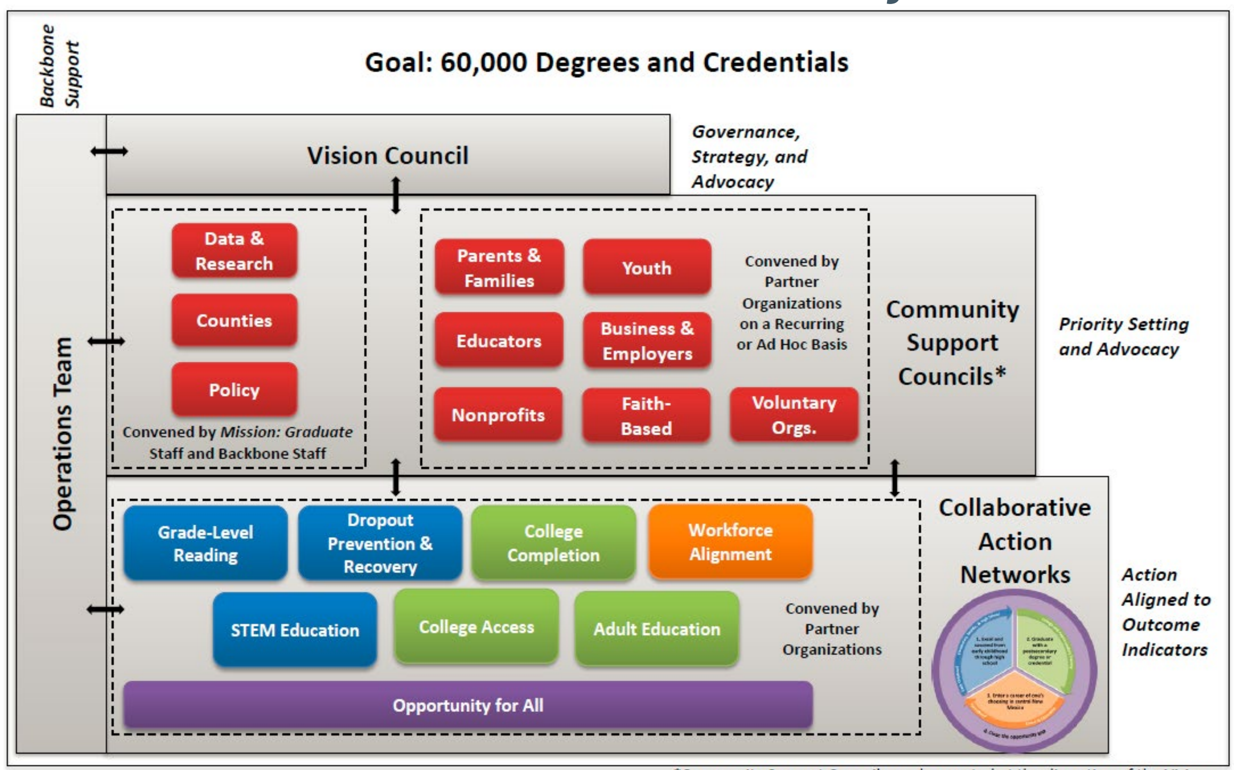
In addition to convening high-level leaders in the region, Mission: Graduate is working to engage key community stakeholders, including: parents and families, youth, educators, business owners, faith-based organizations, nonprofits, and voluntary organizations on community support councils. Mission: Graduate staff are responsible for organizing six community support councils that are designed to provide data-informed recommendations to the collaborative action networks about priority strategies to ensure that each action plan: (1) addresses the needs of the community, (2) leverages existing assets, and (3) represents the interests of community stakeholders. These councils will also give regular feedback to the vision council and operations team on strategic direction and advocate on behalf of the partnership to policy makers, institutional leaders, and the public at large.

While the community support councils are designed to make recommendations about priority strategies, the selection of data-informed strategies, development of action plans, and implementation of improvements are the responsibility of collaborative action networks. Collaborative action networks will be aligned around one or two of the partnership's indicators, and will comprise a mix of practitioners with interest and experience in achieving change on the chosen outcomes. Within the collaborative action networks, members will be organized into project teams to complete specific projects.

The operations team is a group that provides the backbone support for Mission: Graduate and acts as the connective tissue that ties together all of the partners who are involved in the initiative. This team consists of Mission: Graduate staff who are key leaders from partner organizations. The partnership has divided this support group into three operational committees: fundraising, community engagement, and marketing. This division allows the operations team to assume a diverse set of responsibilities including: establishing a data management infrastructure to report on community-level outcomes and to make recommendations for continuous improvement; advocating for support to nurture the work of the collaborative action networks; and marshaling investment for the entire partnership.

While clearly filling unique roles for the partnership, the different groups within Mission: Graduate's accountability structure are interconnected to ensure seamless communication and shared ownership of the work of the partnership. The vision council, which has responsibility for governance, strategy and advocacy, will use feedback from the community support councils and collaborative action network to advocate for necessary changes. And the collaborative action networks, which are charged with implementing action plans, will use recommendations made by the community support councils to inform and frame their decisions. All three of these groups (vision council, community support councils, and collaborative action networks) are dependent on the operations team for support. It is the interactions between these different groups and their intertwining responsibilities that characterize an inclusive and functional accountability structure.

Mission: Graduate Accountability Structure



*Community Support Councils can be created at the discretion of the Vision Council or Operations Team as new community groups are identified.

View Mission: Graduate's accountability structure & detailed descriptions of groups

Concentric Structure:

A concentric structure is an organizational structure that depicts the different groups of an organization in concentric rings, where often the top management groups are represented in the middle of the circle with subsequent level groups radiating outward.

Pros:

-Perceived to be more inclusive and less top-down
-Eliminates the concept of an individual or group being 'above' or 'below' another

Cons:

-Decision making and work-flow is less clear
-Reporting structure is less clear

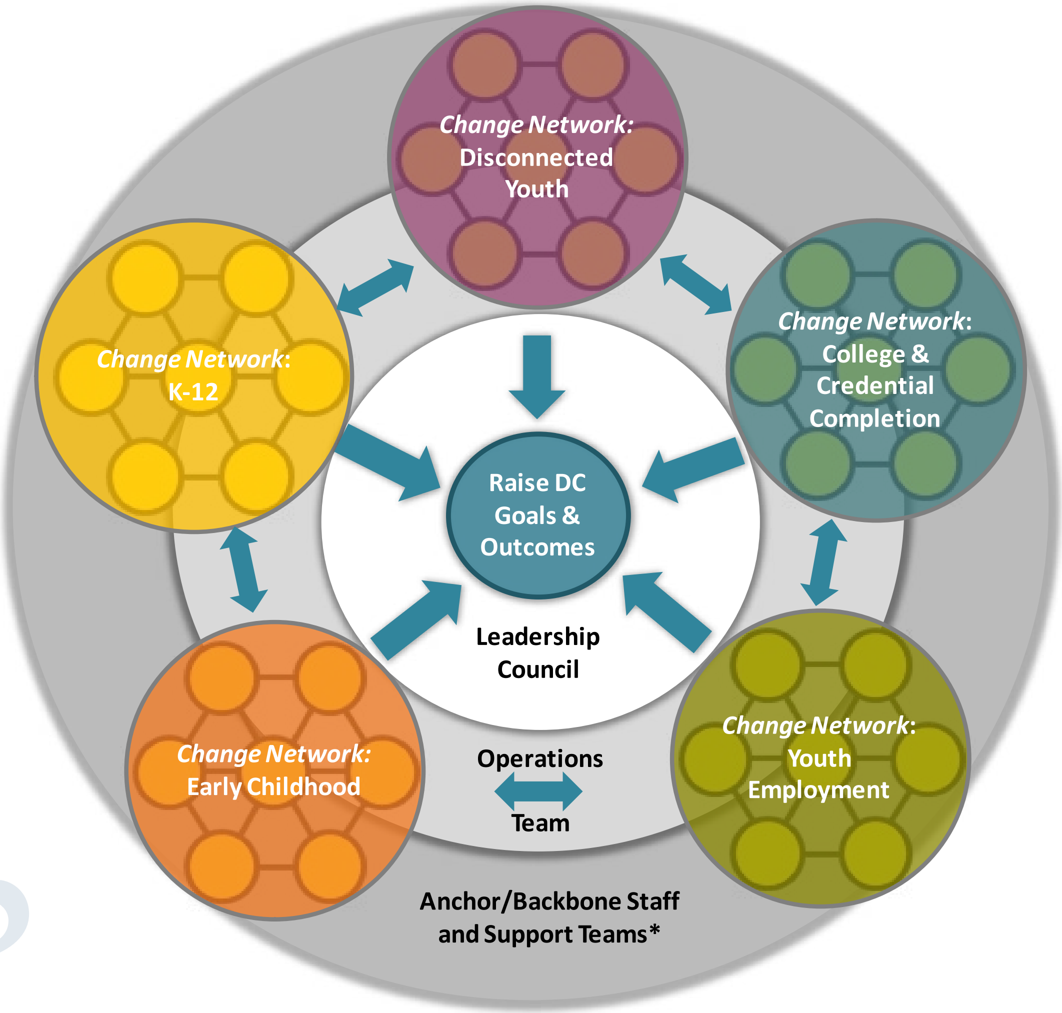
Story: *Raise DC*

"Raise DC, the cradle to career partnership in Washington DC, was originally convened by the District of Columbia mayor's office to ensure all District youth are provided the opportunity for success from cradle to career. Leaders from across government, education, business, philanthropic, and non-profit sectors have come together around a common set of goals to drive the work forward. To support the work, Raise DC has organized the different roles and groups of the partnership into a 'lasting civic infrastructure' represented by their accountability structure. Paying special attention to the perception and communication of the partnership to the broader community, Raise DC was one of the first Strive Network Members to represent their structure using series of concentric groups. This visual helped the partnership communicate a desire to be less top-down and more inclusive than previous DC initiatives. The main components of the Raise DC accountability structure include the executive team, leadership council, change networks, and anchor institution.

The executive team is a core group of cross-sector leaders who provide strategic guidance for Raise DC. Members possess the authority to leverage significant financial and/or social capital to advance the goals and outcomes of the partnership. The leadership council is a larger group of executive-level leaders from the government, businesses, universities, community/service organizations, and philanthropies, who drive collaborative action towards improving common outcomes. The leadership council collectively and continuously reviews the effectiveness of strategies and advises on necessary revisions. The change networks are the groups of key practitioners and issue experts who use data to identify those successful strategies which the leadership council reviews, and commit to implementing those strategies into their respective policies, practices, and programs. They continuously monitor the progress of these strategies and report their progress and challenges to the leadership council. All of these groups are supported by the anchor institution, which is a neutral entity that provides key staff and data supports, which communicate and work across sectors. Originally the partnership was anchored by the mayor's office; however, that role has since been transitioned to the community foundation for sustainability reasons.

An interesting aspect of Raise DC's accountability structure is the overlapping that occurs throughout the accountability structure, indicating that members of one group might also participate in another group. For example, the executive team is a subset of members from the leadership council, so all members of the executive team also participate in the leadership council. Similarly, some members from the leadership team also participate in the change network. This overlapping is an intentional way to ensure effective communication and clear work flows across the different groups in the accountability structure. To further facilitate communications between the leadership council and the change networks, Raise DC is in the process of improving their accountability structure to include an operations team. This team would be comprised of the key operational staff of the Leadership Council members and chairs of each change network. The group would ensure that the vision and priorities set by the Leadership Council are operationalized, identify hurdles that need to be overcome, support the Networks to achieve their goals, and lift up critical issues for consideration by the Leadership Council.

Raise DC's Accountability Structure



View Raise DC's accountability structure & detailed descriptions of groups

Formalizing the Accountability Structure:

Creating an accountability structure not only involves outlining roles, groups, work-flows, and a design, it also involves the agreements and processes that need to be put in place to ensure the accountability structure is fully functional. The type of agreements that are necessary depend on how formal the partnership needs to be. Agreements can occur between different groups and individuals throughout the partnership. Typically, formalized agreements occur between the following:

- **Individual members** of a group within the accountability structure (i.e. all members of the leadership table sign an agreement that outlines their roles and responsibilities as members of the leadership table)
- **Different groups** within the accountability structure (i.e. an agreement that outlines the expectations and responsibilities between the leadership table and a collaborative action network)
- Across the **entire partnership** (i.e. agreements or guidelines that outline the rules and operating expectations of all groups in the partnership)
- Two or more **partner organizations** (i.e. an agreement outlining the expectations of a partner organization and the anchor entity)

Partnership Agreement:

A partnership agreement is a voluntary agreement that outlines the operating principles among partners about how they will interact with each other, accomplish goals, and improve outcomes over time. Whereas partnership agreements in the business sector are often contractual documents to clarify revenue sharing from a merger of parties, partnership agreements in the cradle to career context are usually much less formal with a purpose of clarifying roles and responsibilities, not legally binding partners to a contract.

What's in a Partnership Agreement?

Often, a partnership agreement contains the following elements:

- **Parties Involved**: Who is the partnership agreement between? Individuals or groups involved?
- **Purpose**: Why is the partnership agreement being created?
- **Objectives**: What are the intentions of the work governed by the partnership agreement?
- **Operational**: What are the roles and responsibilities of each of the parties involved? What are the operating principles for an effective working relationship?
- **Organizational**: What is the role of the organizations that a party belongs to in the partnership? (i.e. if the CEO for the local United Way is signing the partnership agreement, what is the role of the United Way staff in the partnership?)
- **Signatures**: All necessary partners involved in the partnership agreement sign the document.

When might you use a Partnership Agreement?

A partnership agreement is often the least legally binding way to formalize and operationalize the roles in an accountability structure and is a great tool to clarify responsibilities and expectations without deterring partners who are averse to contractual agreements. Partnership agreements within a cradle to career partnership could occur between different groups in the accountability structure (i.e. between the leadership table and a collaborative action network) or between partners within a group in the accountability structure (i.e. between the different members of the leadership table). Often, we see a partnership agreement used at the leadership table to clarify the roles of different partners and partner organizations in the partnership. Additionally, partnership agreements can also outline the connection between the leadership table and the anchor entity, specifically defining the responsibilities of the anchor entity with core staff.

View The Strive Partnership's Example Partnership Agreement

Memorandum of Understanding:

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) is an agreement between two or more parties that describes a convergence of efforts and the principles of a working relationship. A MOU is not inherently legally binding, unless it contains the appropriate legal elements.

What's in a Memorandum of Understanding?

Often, an MOU contains the following elements:

- **Parties Involved**: Who does this MOU pertain to? Who is involved in the agreement?
- **Purpose**: Why is the MOU being created?
- **Scope**: What is the extent of the work to be accomplished governed by the MOU?
- **Objectives**: What are the intentions of the work governed by the MOU?
- **Financials**: What are the resources contributed and received by each party?
- **Operational**: What are the roles and responsibilities of each of the parties involved? What are the operating principles for an effective working relationship?
- **Terms, Termination, Legal**: How long is the MOU in effect? How can the MOU be terminated? Is there any additional legal wording that needs to be included?
- **Signatures**: All necessary partners involved in the MOU sign the document.

When might you use an MOU?

Memorandums of understanding, unless specifically designed to be, are not legally binding nor initiate a contractual agreement between the parties involved. In situations where partners are weary of or unwilling to take part in a legally binding agreement, an MOU could be an effective yet less threatening alternative. Because partners are not legally required to carry out the terms in an MOU, the integrity of parties involved to adhere to the agreed upon objectives and operating principles is extremely important. MOUs within a cradle to career partnership often occur between different organizations in the partnership (i.e. between the anchor entity and partner organization), but can also occur between different groups in the accountability structure (i.e. between the collaborative action networks and the leadership table).

[View Aspire's Example MOU]

Partnership Bylaws:

Partnership bylaws are rules that a partnership establishes to govern itself. Bylaws are often the most formal type of agreement used in outlining roles, responsibilities and expectations of a partnership accountability structure and can be very detailed and extensive.

What's in Partnership Bylaws?

Often, bylaws contain the following elements:

- **Name of partnership**: What is the partnership's formal name? Are there other informal names for the partnership?
- **Description/definition of partnership**: What is the partnership? What sectors are involved? When was it formed?
- **Vision, mission, goals of partnership**: What is the vision, mission and goals of the partnership?
- **Purpose**: What is the purpose of the partnership? What does the partnership aim to impact?
- **Structure**: What is the overall structure of the partnership? What is the membership?
  - Accountability structure group: Identify a group in the accountability structure? (i.e. leadership council)
  - Description of accountability structure group: What is the intention of this accountability structure? (i.e. The leadership council is a group of cross-sector executive community leaders who set the direction of the partnership)
  - Roles/Responsibilities of the accountability structure group: What are the different roles the group is responsible for carrying out? (i.e. The leadership council is responsible for convening partners; strategic decision making; and removing political and financial barriers)

What's in Partnership Bylaws? (Continued)

- o Leaders of the accountability structure group: Who are the chairs/ co-chairs of this group and what is there role?
- o Membership of accountability structure group: Who is involved in the accountability structure group? (i.e. Leadership council members) Are members elected or appointed and by whom?
- o Flow of information: How will necessary information be communicated to and from the accountability structure group?

- Bylaw Approval, Amendments, and Processes: How are new bylaws approved? How are bylaws changed? What are the necessary legal processes to enforce these bylaws?

When might you use Partnership Bylaws?

Partnership bylaws are most helpful in situations where the partnership has decided to form its own 501c3 organization and must create its own guidelines by which to operate. Bylaws, because they are so detailed and thorough, have the potential to be lengthy and complex. Since a major purpose of these agreements is to increase clarity and understanding across the partnership on roles, responsibilities, and expectations, making sure these sometimes lengthy documents are still easily readable is very important.

View Bridge to Success's Example Bylaws

View Bridge to Success's Example Policies & Procedures

What's Next?

The 'Building an Accountability Structure Toolkit' is the initial piece of a larger 'Getting Started Playbook' that is focused on helping communities meet the key quality benchmarks in the Exploring Gateway of the Strive Theory of Action. This playbook will be made up of individual toolkits and resources focused on specific topics within the quality benchmarks, but are linked together to create a comprehensive guide on how to effectively get some of the beginning pieces of this work in place. In addition to the 'Building an Accountability Structure Toolkit,' the 'Getting Started Playbook' will also include toolkits on recruiting the right staff, building the leadership table, selecting the right anchor and building a budget.

Strive

Every child. Cradle to career.

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