

Organizing Stakeholders: Building a participation structure and relationships

In collaborative work, the word “stakeholder” can mean different things- from the individuals making staffing, programmatic, and budgetary decisions, to a minimally involved infrequent advisor and anyone in between. It is important that a collaborative group define the desired level of stakeholder involvement to both clarify the amount of time stakeholders spend and the kinds of decision making for which they will be responsible. For example, if a community has a coalition working to align prenatal-to-three services and family supports, representatives of the juvenile justice system may see the value of supporting this work and want to be involved but may only want or need to be informed via an annual update. In the same community, federally qualified health centers, child care providers, and home visitors are more likely to be in a direct service role and therefore be more central to decision making and needed in more regular meetings. Most groups, especially as they grow in size, often find it useful to distinguish levels of involvement to help provide clarity on expectations, roles, and responsibilities.

Having a structure helps your coalition or collaborative establish:

- ⇒ A clear governing structure appropriate for the goals of the collaboration.
- ⇒ A defined structure or method for operating to support the functions and activities of the group.
- ⇒ Formal roles and responsibilities for all levels of the organizational structure.

Here are some topic areas, with questions to consider in each, as you frame out your coalition:

Structure

- What does it mean to be a “partner” and what does that entail? (Does it mean monthly participation? Active work on one set of goals? Assuming a leadership role? Taking responsibility for work?)
- Who is the lead contact for ensuring linkage between the collaborative and each partner organization?
- Who establishes and decides on the design of a governance framework? Who is involved and what is their role?
- What are our organizational and committee structures? Reporting lines and relationships?
- Is there staffing? Who supervises the staff? What are their responsibilities? What are the feedback structures?
- Who decides what is to be done? How will it get done?

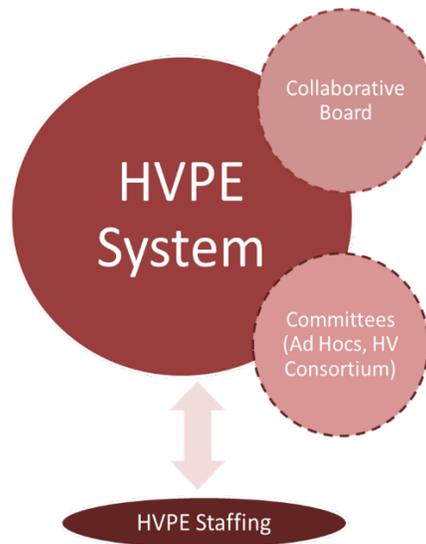
Responsibility and Decision-making Approach

- How will decisions be made?
- What authority do committees have and what are the associated responsibilities?
- Who holds functional accountabilities for day-to-day management?
- What oversight is provided and by whom?

Once a collaboration has been operating for a while, it is important to periodically review the structure to assure it is the best structure to get the work done. It is especially helpful to review the structure as a group when there are staffing, personnel, or role changes to assure that everyone is on the same page. **The next pages are examples from the field of how two different collaboratives framed their structures and explained the relationships between them.**

Example 1: North Carolina Home Visiting and Parenting Education (HVPE) System

STRUCTURE AND RELATIONSHIPS



Elements	Who?	Authority
Collaborative Board	Public/private, with representatives from state and local level constituents, including all entities administering public funding, will function as strategic guidance for the governance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accountable for HVPE system and infrastructure. Provide guidance and oversight for the HVPE System Director.
Committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standing committees to encourage deeper participation by members and additional stakeholders, informing the Collaborative Board and Director. Other subcommittees, in the form of ad hoc work groups, will be populated in a time delimited fashion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accomplish assigned activities. Make recommendations for system changes.
Staffing	<p>HVPE Systems Director (Executive level).</p> <p>Manager: support for Content Areas or Regional/Community work.</p> <p>Administrative Project Coordinator.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Director supervises additional staff. Staff guide and support the work of committees.
Administrative Agency	North Carolina Partnership for Children (hire Director).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management of staff, webpage, communications, funding, and contracts for HVPE system work.

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Example from the field #2:

A. EPEL Collaboration: Role

The Elgin Partnership for Early Learning Collaboration serves as a broadly representative stakeholder body that acknowledges the community-wide impact of ensuring all children in Elgin are equipped to succeed in school and life. It embraces its ability to bring skills and resources to the issues in anticipation of working together. The role of the Collaboration is to inform and advise the priorities of the EPEL annual work plan and longer-term strategic plan, advance the impact of EPEL by facilitating connections and supporting the implementation of work, and to spread common messages on positively impacting the health and development of children and families.

EPEL Collaboration: Membership and Responsibilities

The Elgin Partnership for Early Learning Collaboration membership includes multiple levels of participation; stakeholders that are Collaboration members fall into several categories:

- Tier I – Executive Committee members, Subcommittee members, Parent Council members. Individuals and organizations in Tier I represent those who are critically involved in systems serving young children and their families including schools, hospitals/health care, social services, early learning and child care programs, family support programs, government, the faith-based community, higher education and issue area funders.
- Tier II – Community stakeholders invested in the work of EPEL from a less direct perspective. These stakeholders may include elected officials, business leaders, chamber of commerce members, and community members.

The Elgin Partnership for Early Learning is committed to holding a quarterly meeting at which members will engage in discussion on the progress of EPEL, specific issue areas will be brought to the members for input, and tools for shared activities and participation in EPEL will be advanced.

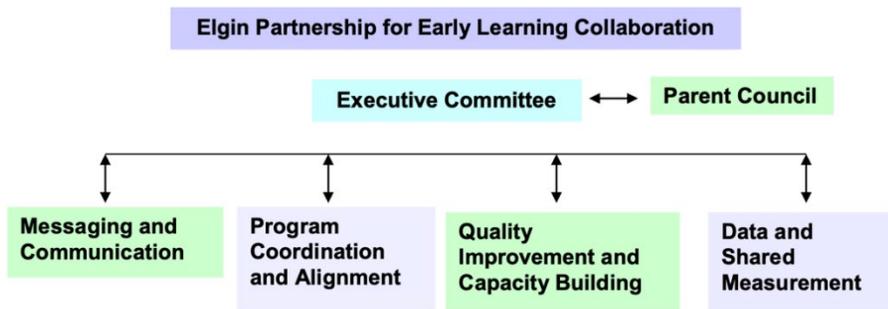
Responsibilities of Collaboration members include:

- Attending the quarterly meeting.
- Joining subcommittee(s) as appropriate.
- Being informed on issues specific to the Elgin community and voicing these issues in a constructive manner with the goal of advancing systems change.
- Keeping informed on EPEL communications.
- Offering connections to important resources that may advance the work of EPEL.
- Advancing the value of collaborative work and the importance of a broad group of stakeholders focusing on young children.

EPEL Collaboration: Decision-making Process

The Elgin Partnership for Early Learning Collaboration is an advisory-only body, offering expertise, information, and strategic guidance that the EPEL Executive Committee, subcommittees, and staff will integrate into the overall direction of the Collaboration's effort. Collaboration members have an active role in the work of EPEL through volunteering on subcommittees or electing to serve on the Executive Committee.

The structure of the relationship across the levels of involvement in the collaboration:



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