

## CREATING SHARED GOVERNANCE

# DESIGNING THE RIGHT COLLABORATION GOVERNANCE<sup>1</sup>

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## PURPOSE

While there are generic organizing structures and fairly consistent core governance functions, there is a great deal of variety in how collaborations choose to fulfil accountability and make decisions; assign roles and responsibilities; and coordinate efforts. There are many factors to be considered. Discussing with your collaboration partners some key questions and considerations and coming to shared resolution on how to address them will allow you to design 'fit-for-purpose' governance structures and processes.

## HOW TO USE THE TOOL

- Use the series of questions early in a collaboration to design governance structures and processes. The tool can also be used to review the choices of structure and processes as the collaboration matures and/or circumstances change.
- Reflect on each of the questions and considerations with collaboration partners. Think about the implications for your collaboration.
- Determine how each question will be resolved - who needs to participate, what research or discussion is required and how the decisions will be made. If the collaboration is a simple one, then the answers will be easier than in the case of a more complex collaboration with multiple and diverse partners and/or a challenging set of intended outcomes.
- While the questions are in a logical order, it may be necessary to go back and forth through the questions because some of the elements are interdependent.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Building a Nonprofit Network: Linda Mollenhauer, Valerie Johnston, Janine Gates; for Ontario Volunteer Centres Network (2011)



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Questions to Resolve	Key Considerations	Implications for your collaboration	Action plan for developing the best governance
<p><b>What is our shared understanding of governance?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Because partners will have different experiences of governance, it is important to agree on what it means. This will allow all partners to start conversations about governance from the same assumptions and understandings. Also, think about governance requirements at each stage of the collaboration life cycle because they can change as the collaboration evolves.</li> <li>• Governance in collaboration is usually different than governance in a traditional organization because there are multiple autonomous entities which must share authority, accountability and responsibilities. Think about governance as:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the structures (e.g. steering committee, lead agencies, joint Boards committee) and processes (e.g. who makes what decisions; how accountability is fulfilled; how the resources are allocated) that enable the accomplishment of the collaboration's goals</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		
<p><b>Are we clear about our shared purpose?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before decisions are made about governance, be clear about the unifying purpose so there is a shared understanding and agreement about what is to be achieved, for whom and the benefits of coming together. While this will evolve as the collaboration matures, the governance should be designed to fit the purpose, not the other way around. A collaboration, for example, that addresses complex issues requires more intentional and intricate governance than one that is less complicated.</li> </ul>		

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<p><b>What expectations, opportunities, restrictions, resources and systems does each of our partners bring to the collaboration?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborations can be more complex than other project or program work because they bring together multiple organizations, with their own unique circumstances, histories, demands and values. Understanding these will affect the design of your governance. For example, a collaboration that:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• shares strong values about inclusion, will need to have more consultative and consensual decision-making;</li> <li>• has diverse partners without strong connections to one other will need to build in more time to negotiate shared goals and more transparent processes for making decisions and holding each other accountable;</li> <li>• can draw more skills and competencies from all of its partners, will depend less on the resources of a few partners or from outside sources (creating potential control and disengagement issues).</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Learn about (e.g. through meetings or a survey) :             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the missions, strategic priorities, main activities, perspectives, cultures and key stakeholders of each of the partners</li> <li>• benefits each receives from participation</li> <li>• relevant management expectations or systems that could impact the way the collaboration works together</li> <li>• what accountability requirements each of the partners needs to fulfill to its own organization and its stakeholders</li> <li>• the knowledge, capacities, opportunities and resources they can bring to help in governance decision-making and in accomplishing the work</li> <li>• any restrictions partner organizations may have that impact on the collaboration structure and processes (e.g. risk management protocols; human resource policies).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		

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<p><b>What expectations, opportunities, restrictions, resources and systems does each of our partners bring to the collaboration? (cont'd)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider the degree of alignment with the goals, needs, values and interests of the collaboration. In order for governance to work, these will need to be reconciled. The degree these need to be aligned is determined by the level of partner integration required to achieve the collaborative outcomes.</li> <li>• Watch that one partner does not impose their own systems, culture or goals on the collaboration, particularly if they are a funder or lead agency. This work needs to be done together, finding the best of each partner's practices and what works for the particular collaboration .</li> </ul>		
<p><b>What are the accountability requirements?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborations usually involve multiple, and often complex, layers of accountability. The starting point is to clearly identify who the collaboration is accountable to, for what and how it can fulfill that accountability. (See Tool: Accountability Matrix).</li> </ul>		

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<p><b>What governance functions need to be fulfilled?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that all key partners are clear about the core functions of governance (See: Tool: Core Governance Functions)            Don't assume everyone shares the same understanding. Core governance functions in a collaboration are the same as a single organization. But unlike an organization that has a Board of Directors, there are multiple ways they can be fulfilled. The functions don't need to rest with one entity.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>What is our organizing structure?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are some generic organizing structures to select from that will give form to your collaboration. They include a collectively organized model, lead agency(s), shared administrative platform and separate organizational entity.</li> <li>• To determine the best one for your collaboration, go to Tool: Select the Best Organizing Structure and review the options and pros and cons of each.</li> </ul>		

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<p><b>How will we delineate and fulfill the roles and responsibilities?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Now that you have a broad sense of the organizing structure, think about the roles and responsibilities that need to be fulfilled. Clearly distinguish between the governance and implementation work.</li> <li>• Think about the collaboration’s values and the skills and capacities available to the collaboration. Do these lead to a more concentrated and hierarchal structure or more dispersed and consensual?</li> <li>• Determine how the roles and responsibilities will be fulfilled. For example, will you set up a Steering Committee? If so, to whom will it be accountable? If there is a lead agency(s), which roles and responsibilities must they fulfil and which ones does the collaboration want to assign to it? Should work groups be formal committees or time and task specific? What staff can be assigned from partnering organizations to help with implementation?</li> <li>• What reporting mechanisms (e.g. minutes, reports, memos) need to be put in place? Review the ‘Accountability Matrix’ and think about all of the accountability requirements.</li> <li>• Create clear terms of reference for each decision-making and implementation group. Clearly assign accountabilities and be sure that roles and responsibilities align with the authority to fulfil them. Be very clear about expectations; don’t just list activities. Watch that roles and responsibilities don’t duplicate and avoid vague descriptions that are open to interpretation.</li> </ul>		

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<p><b>What decision-making processes need to be put in place?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decision-making is more complex in collaborations because they comprise autonomous organizations with multiple accountabilities. It can create power dynamics and tensions if partners feel that they are not included equally in decision-making. But consultative and consensual decision-making can also lead to inefficient or convoluted decision-making. The challenge is to find the right balance between these two. (See: Tool: Keys to Governance Success)</li> <li>Determine who will make what decisions and how they will be made and write it down so that everyone understands and agrees to it. Think about what kind of decisions need to be unanimous or consensual (versus majority) because they have a significant impact on all partners. Also think about when and which partners need to be consulted.</li> <li>Know when to use a facilitator to help ensure that decision-making is objective, fair and inclusive.</li> <li>Ensure your leaders understand the unique skills required in collaborations (See: Tool Are you a Good Collaborative Leader?) and if necessary, provide training or education on participatory and facilitated decision-making.</li> </ul>		

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<p><b>What communication is required?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Determine what communication processes, protocols and vehicles are required to ensure that partners and key external stakeholders are fully engaged and informed.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>How will our relationships, structure and processes be documented?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A collaboration should develop a written agreement that captures the understanding about how partners will work together.(See: Tool: Agreement Template) The agreement may be a brief informal 'letter of understanding' or a formal more comprehensive document which lays out explicit and enforceable rules and guidelines.</li> <li>The development of an agreement is an opportunity to clarify expectations, structures and processes and make sure all partners, and their respective organizations, understand them. While it describes the relationship, it's best to revisit and revise regularly to reflect changing needs, outcomes and opportunities. The degree of formality and depth of detail depends on the nature of the collaboration. (See: Tool: Critical Factors)</li> </ul>		