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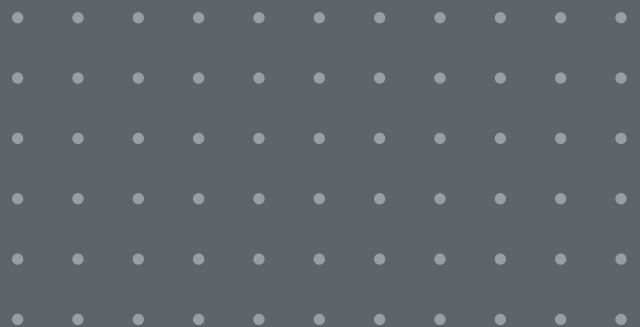
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Giving kids the best start

Building Community Partnership Governance Capacity: *Strategies and Lessons from Best Start*

This Best Practice Brief is part of series funded by **First 5 LA** in order to document effective community capacity building strategies that have been utilized in support of Best Start, a place-based initiative designed to catalyze, strengthen and elevate empowering and innovative approaches that improve the lives of children prenatal to age 5.

Introduction

This issue brief is meant to provide members of community-led organizations and their partners with a detailed introduction to effective strategies for building governance capacity. Featured guidance, examples and resources are drawn from the experiences of First 5 Los Angeles (F5LA) Best Start Communities and the CSSP Partnership Support Team.

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This series of Best Practice Briefs were commissioned by First 5 LA's Best Start Communities Department and authored by members of CSSP's Partnership Support Capacity Building Team. The purpose of the series is to:

- Highlight Best Start capacity building strategies that have been most effective, in order to support Best Start community leaders as they continue this work and share lessons learned from LA's Best Start Community Partnerships with the broader field.

- Add the richness and depth of on-the-ground and recent experiences of community partnerships in Los Angeles to the existing knowledge around results-oriented community approaches to improve outcomes for young children and their families.

- Enhance understanding of what community-led, place-based initiatives require to succeed.

- Identify helpful lessons and recommendations that can be used to shape future community change efforts.

Together with First 5 LA, which is committed to ongoing learning and improvement, the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) welcomes the opportunity to document and share impactful Best Start capacity building strategies with those who are leading the next phase of its development, as well as others in the broader community change field committed to better and more equitable outcomes for children and families. CSSP is a national policy, research, technical assistance organization whose mission is to help create a racially, economically, and socially just society in which all children and families thrive. CSSP has offices in LA, Washington, D.C., and New York.

Overview

Section I: Background

- Defines the purpose and key elements of governance structures.
- Summarizes principles of effective governance for community change initiatives.

Section II: Laying the Groundwork

- Describes the basic Best Start Community Partnership (BSC) governance structure.
- Provide a rationale for investing in building governance capacity.

Section III: Capacity Building in Action

- Explains how priorities for building governance capacity were aligned with community partnership growth.
- Describes common BSC governance challenges, and presents brief examples of how they were addressed.
- Outlines the role of capacity builders and recommended strategies for building BSC governance capacity.
- Lists key indicators for measuring the impact of capacity building strategies on BSCs and participating members.

Section IV: Major Reflections and Lessons Learned

- Summarizes lessons learned related to developing and implementing strategies designed to strengthen the governance capacity of community-led organizations.

Section V: Recommended Resources

- Lists recommended reading, tools, and organizations that can serve as an additional resource for community-led organizations that are developing or assessing governance practices.

Background

What is a Governance Structure?

Governance is defined as the process of making decisions that guide the actions of an organization or institution.

Governance structures include the leadership bodies and management practices—such as a Board of Directors or an Executive Committee—that organizations establish to support ongoing decision-making and operations. Their primary purpose is to provide those who are engaged in joint work with an organized approach to achieving their shared goals and objectives. They are also integral to establishing and maintaining healthy working relationships that are based on shared accountability, especially in large organizations that engage in multiple levels of decision-making.

Governance structures are usually documented via written agreements or policies that define an organization's purpose, decision-making processes, and key roles. The level of detail and formality included in governance policies varies according to an organization's goals and activities. For example, a local government that serves a large city may uphold promoting the public good as its aim and establish several distinct departments to manage different aspects of its work, such as education, public safety, or infrastructure maintenance. By contrast, a nonprofit organization within the same city may be governed by a small board of directors and pursue a more specific goal (e.g. assisting the homeless, offering youth mentorship programs, etc.).

"Governance structures are basically operating manuals that explain how an organization is put together and managed."

Why Effective Governance Matters

Effective governance policies and structures are essential to advancing an organization's principles and mission. Specifically, they increase the likelihood of achieving success by:

- Helping to develop and implement sound goals and strategies.

- Establishing systems to review operations and outcomes, which contributes to increased effectiveness and efficiency.

- Emphasizing the importance of ethical behavior and accountability in order to strengthen an organization's credibility and performance.

- Creating avenues for shared leadership and well-organized collaboration, both within and across teams. Because governance greatly impacts everyone, including directors, managers, volunteers, partners, and stakeholders, having clear, consistent standards for making good decisions, engaging others, and pursuing goals is critical.

> **"When everyone practices principles of good governance, it creates an honest, open environment that holds everyone accountable and keeps them on track."**
>
> **–Nick Price, from How to Ensure Good Governance for Your Nonprofit, www.boardeffect.com**

Key Elements of Governance

While governance policies and structures may greatly differ, they typically include 4 major elements:

Design	• How are organizational functions and work flows set up? • How are work groups, departments, and/or committees structured?

Management and Accountability	• How are leadership and management roles defined?
	  – Who oversees key responsibilities?
	  – Where does decision-making authority lie?
	 • How is success measured and tracked?
	 • How is accountability promoted and managed?

Culture	• What are the organization's guiding values and operating principles? • How are effective leadership and goal achievement supported (e.g. training, coaching, peer support)? • How are continuous learning and improvement encouraged?
Infrastructure	• What policies and procedures have been established as a guide for decision-making? • What communications and reporting systems are being used to support operations?

Effective Governance & Community Change Initiatives

For those involved in community change initiatives such as Best Start, governance has the dual focus of advancing a social mission, and ensuring that organizations are viable, not only in terms of managing daily operations and resources, but also with respect to maintaining public confidence and trust.

Although there is no single best approach to promoting effective governance, well-run, trusted community-based organizations tend to have several key characteristics in common:

Effectiveness and Efficiency. The processes and plans that are implemented produce favorable results for communities while making the best use of resources.

Transparency. Information regarding policies, practices, and outcomes is directly available to those who are affected by them, and documentation procedures ensure that decisions and actions can be reviewed for compliance with established rules and agreements.

Responsiveness. Processes and plans that aim to serve the best interests of residents and community stakeholders are carried out within a reasonable timeframe.

Inclusiveness. Decision-making processes seek to ensure that diverse resident and stakeholder interests are reflected in policies, including the experiences and perspectives of groups who are typically marginalized or excluded.

Accountability. Decisions and actions are subject to regular oversight to ensure that stated objectives are met and benefit the community as intended.

Meaningful Participation. Community residents and stakeholders are engaged as valued partners in not only informing, but also helping to lead decision-making processes and any subsequent actions.

Laying the Groundwork

Best Start Community Partnership Governance Structures

Within Best Start Community Partnerships (BSCs), governance policies are known as **bylaws**: a set of rules and guidelines that members of an organization are expected to follow. Per First 5 LA's guidance, they typically include:

- **A Purpose Statement** that explains why the Partnership exists and what it seeks to accomplish, based on Best Start goals and community-defined priorities.

- **Core Values** that articulate guiding beliefs and principles that inform Partnership decisions and actions.

- **Membership Criteria** that indicates who is eligible to become a voting Partnership member and the requirements for maintaining membership in good standing (e.g. regular attendance, work group involvement).

- **A Description of Key Partnership Roles** that outline leadership, work group and member responsibilities related to managing and monitoring ongoing activities.

- **Decision-Making Processes** such as procedures for recommending, reviewing, and approving proposed Partnership actions, including voting guidelines and group agreements.

- **Geographic Boundaries** that describe the locale (e.g. municipalities and/or neighborhoods) and physical boundaries that designate a Best Start Community.

- **Conflict Management Protocols** that outline the steps to be taken to resolve work-related conflicts in a constructive manner.

- **Conflict of Interest Policies** that provide clear guidelines for avoiding personal or professional conflicts involving Partnership decisions and activities.

- **Resource Management Guidelines** that establish rules and procedures for managing financial resources, including available discretionary funds.

Since Best Start was launched, each Community Partnership has received ongoing capacity building support to establish or update bylaws as needed.

WHY INVEST IN BUILDING GOVERNANCE CAPACITY?

The most important reason to invest in strengthening governance capacity for the Best Start Community Partnerships was to promote community ownership. It was important for residents and stakeholders to jointly define a **shared vision** for achieving Best Start goals and communicate with a **united voice** about their work. Newly established groups can get stuck in what are known as the **forming** or **storming** phases of Partnership development if they do not dedicate time to clarifying their purpose, values and work processes. Forming and storming are often characterized by confusion or power struggles within groups, which can prevent group members from working together effectively and accomplishing their goals. When processes for decision-making, information sharing, electing leadership, and work group participation are clearly defined, conflict related to the management of roles, tasks or activities is minimized. Established processes also help to ensure transparency, equitable opportunities, and appropriate accountability.

Capacity builders sought to support community members in determining together how they would agree on community priorities, develop and implement Best Start strategies, and manage work processes. This is because group members in any setting are more likely to honor agreements if they establish these agreements for themselves. Another important reason to establish governance policies is that as resident balance family and work obligations with volunteer commitments, their involvement can fluctuate. Written governance policies help Best Start Partnerships to conduct their work and mobilize members in a consistent manner over time.

Finally, applying rules and policies in a consistent, unbiased manner when working in one's own community can be very challenging, especially when strong ties among decision-makers and stakeholders exist. In circumstances where relationships or personal history could influence decisions, governance policies can help to ensure that power and authority are used fairly. In short, governance policies provide helpful clarity about the various ways stakeholders can help lead, inform or support Best Start Partnership efforts, no matter when they got involved or how often they participate.

"An organization without governance is like a train without a track."

Capacity Building in Action

Aligning Community Partnership Growth and Bylaws Development

There are four stages of development that groups undergo after they are formed or experience major changes: forming, storming, norming, and performing. **Forming** involves bringing people together to start or revisit the partnership-building process, when stakeholders being to define goals, strategies, and a structure for getting work done. The **storming** stage follows as members then begin to question the purpose and direction of the group (e.g., "Why am I here?" "What's my role?" "Do we have the right priorities?"). During this time, it's important for group members to be open and honest about their perceptions and share recommendations for resolving concerns. When groups reach shared agreements and develop clear protocols for managing ongoing work, they have entered the **norming** stage. Ultimately, this leads to **performing**—the stage when group members are working together smoothly as a team and accomplishing their objectives.

The Best Start Community Partnerships (BSCs)'s evolution and growth has reflected these four stages of group development. In the early years following the initiative's launch, Partnerships focused on **forming**: establishing basic infrastructure, such as guidance bodies, elected leaders, membership criteria, and agendas for regular monthly meetings. Later on, through the Learning by Doing Process, BSCs identified community-specific priorities and developed strategies for implementing the Building Stronger Families Framework, which required reaching agreement around shared values and goals ("storming"). At that time, developing processes for creating and approving community strategies became a major focus, along with establishing protocols for maintaining strong collaborative relationships with grantees. BSC involvement in organizing special events, launching community projects and managing budgeting funds has also increased significantly in that last two years, evidence of the **performing** stage.

But these four stages are not simply finished once and then put aside. As the scope of Community Partnership activities gradually expanded, additional oversight and decision-making guidance was needed to keep pace with changing work demands, which prompted BSC leaders to dedicate more time to reviewing and updating existing governance policies, including work group structure, the chain of decision-making, and resource management guidelines. The introduction of these new policies and stakeholders often resulted in BSCs revisiting the forming, storming, and norming stages of group development.

COMMON BSC GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES

- In many cases, Partnership bylaws and group agreements had not been regularly reviewed or updated between their initial development and the formulation of Building Stronger Families strategies in 2014. Thus, existing governance structures did not reflect how BSC activities and member responsibilities had grown during that period. New governance policies had to be created to adequately support emerging areas of work.

- With the introduction of new work activities and collaborators came added confusion about Partnership goals, roles, processes, and/or expectations, due to a lack of documented decision-making and oversight processes. The resulting confusion also fueled tension and mistrust among members, especially if there were differing priorities or opinions about how decisions should be made.

- BSC members often expressed concern about halted or slowed progress toward Best Start goals due to inconsistent participation in governing bodies and work groups. However, a majority of Community Partnerships either lacked clear attendance policies or were hesitant to enforce them due to concerns about alienating long-time supporters.

- Many BSCs lacked formal conflict management protocols that were needed to constructively resolve a variety of issues, including: differing opinions about proposed goals, strategies, or decision-making processes; tensions arising from changes in group composition and roles; conflicting individual values, beliefs, or personalities; and disagreements about the best way to utilize limited resources. There were also a few instances where disagreements among members became regularly disruptive to BSC meeting proceedings and collaborative efforts.

- As Partnership responsibilities grew, the efficient use of meeting time became more challenging due to jam-packed agendas and the allure of off-topic discussions. This often made it difficult to give sufficient attention to important topics or complete planned agendas in a timely manner, which prompted BSCs to explore how to improve their work processes.

CAPACITY BUILDING GOALS

Based on the challenges described above, capacity building team members worked with Best Start Communities on:

- Improving alignment between current BSC work and governance structures.

- Ensuring that governance structures, practices, and policies are well-documented and regularly reviewed.

- Developing clear, comprehensive governance policies and processes that help to reduce ambiguity, confusion, and mistrust about how or why decisions are made.

- Instituting management and oversight practices that promote mutual accountability among Partnership members and their collaborators.

- Supporting the creation of conflict management protocols that promote constructive dialogue, mutual learning, fair resolution, and increased trust.

- Refining communication processes to the timely sharing of relevant, up-to-date information among members and stakeholders.

- Effectively orienting new members and leaders to support their meaningful, well-informed participation.

- Defining core values that uplift community leadership, inclusiveness, and collaboration.

- Establishing and upholding membership requirements, including voting eligibility criteria and standards of conduct.

> **"Bylaws give members of a group or organization direction and guidelines for what is accepted behavior within the particular organization. If the boundaries of an organization are defined but the function is not, problems like conflict of interest, misdirection of focus or lack of productive activity will occur."**
>
> **https://ohioline.osu.edu/factsheet/CDFS-1570**

IMPROVING BSC GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES: THE CAPACITY BUILDER'S ROLE

Capacity builders provided a variety of training, facilitation, and coaching support to assist BSCs with improving governance practices. As a starting point, their first priority was to become 'grounded' or well versed in the history, culture and context of Community Partnerships—including relevant background on how group members reached their current state of governance. For example, they explored how leaders were identified and engaged, how decisions were carried out, how BBSC work processes were designed, and which governance practices were working well and which presented challenges.

Once a clear understanding of community context and current governance practices was established, Capacity Builders served as:

Trainers who developed resource materials and presentations to increase BSC knowledge of effective governance practices and enhance members' ability to critically assess what improvements were needed to better support their work.

Facilitators who created a safe space for community members to engage in thoughtful reflection and planning discussions that supported strategic decision-making and consensus building.

Consultants and Coaches who highlighted best practices, offered relevant governance examples from other organizations and/or Best Start communities, and served as a "sounding board" for content questions or decision-making processes.

> **"I wasn't there to make decisions for them as that was their responsibility and right, but to support them in their decision-making for their Community's GS&P through education, facilitation and coaching support and resource/reference materials support. Thus, all of my interactions were based in respect, encouragement, and a reminder that they are fully capable of making recommendations and decisions and that the "ball was in their court", even the decisions that caused the most discomfort for them."**
>
> **-K. Hampton, Best Start Capacity Builder**

Recorders who regularly documented input and decisions related to updating bylaws, restructuring work groups, and refining membership requirements to support BSC implementation. This included modifying governance documents based on approved updates and co-designing reference materials for Partnership members.

See Appendix A for a list of examples from Best Start Communities on addressing governance challenges.

Building Governance Capacity: Recommended Strategies

The following strategy recommendations are based on the experiences of multiple Best Start Communities and observations shared by Partnership Support Team members who served Capacity Builders.

STEP #1: REVIEW KEY GOVERNANCE CONCEPTS TO BUILD FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Introducing or reviewing common governance terms ensures that community members and stakeholders have a sufficient understanding of governance structures (i.e. what is governance; why it matters; and the major components of governance structures or bylaws) as preparation for their own planning and decision-making. It also helps familiarize community members with best practice examples that describe how similar organizations are structured, which helps them better understand what constitutes effective governance and how recommended practices might be adapted to support their own goals and activities.

Suggested Implementation Activities

- Organize 1-2 introductory presentations and discussions to review key governance terms and definitions. Include sample decision-making policies and structures. Suggested topics include: What are governance structures? How do they benefit groups? What does "good governance" look like? What is the difference between an executive committee, work group, and advisory body?

- Facilitate experiential learning by engaging group members in the following three activities:

  – Reviewing sample organizational charts and governance policies/bylaws from other organizations (e.g. school-based groups, neighborhood councils, housing associations, etc.).

  – Sharing their experiences with other groups and how they organized themselves. (What worked well? What was challenging? How can what they learned benefit this group?) Exploring how "governance" works in their daily lives at home, school, work, etc. can help make new terminology and concepts more relatable.

  – Completing a fill-in-the-blank worksheet to what they know about their partnership structure and policies that have been created. This may include dividing members into small groups or pairs to review different sections of the existing governance documents.

TIME

It is important to allocate adequate time to ensure shared understanding of key concepts before moving into policy development. Be sure to incorporate opportunities for members to ask questions and reflect on how what they are learning applies to their own work.

The timeframe for a governance review process can range from a few weeks to several months, depending on the group's goals and starting points. Remember to be flexible and transparent about scheduling. Some groups may be prepared to meet for multiple two hour sessions spanning weeks or months, while others may only be able (or willing) to meet for one or two extended sessions. To support informed decision-making, it is important to openly discuss the impact of time limitations on what can realistically be accomplished as well as the potential consequences of choosing not to address some issues.

Resources and Supports

- Research and share relevant samples of bylaws, policies, and structures from other Best Start communities or organizations with similar goals.

- Ensure that all necessary supplies and supports are available, including:

  – Visuals such as a PowerPoint presentation or handouts that outline key concepts, definitions, and guiding discussion questions.
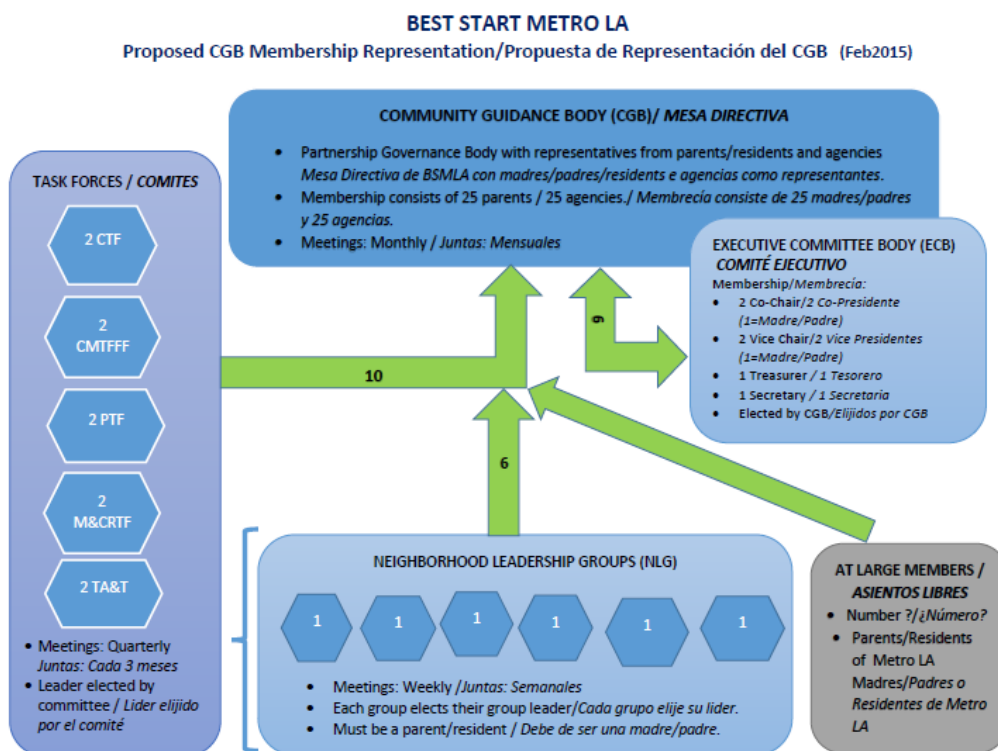
- Fill-in-the-blank worksheets templates for tracking current governance practices.
- Copies of the group's existing organizational charts, bylaws, or written procedures.

What Key Concepts Should Be Highlighted?

1. **Organizational Structure** refers to how the people in an **organization** are grouped, what their functions are, and to whom they report. Its purpose is to outline how the organization operates. Every group will have slightly different terms for the roles individuals and groups play in their organization. Some common terms for various kinds of committees, which recommend policy and actions for approval by the leadership bodies or larger group, includes:

   - Ongoing, major activities, **standing committees** (aka work groups) are established. (Note: Standing committees typically meet monthly, bimonthly, or quarterly, depending on their goals and responsibilities. They should also be included in an organization's bylaws.) For short-term activities, **ad hoc committees** (aka task forces or action committees) are established but they only operate until assigned goals or activities are completed.

   - An **Executive Committee** is an elected or appointed leadership body that decides on the priorities or order of business of an organization and manages the general course of its operations.

   - **Advisory Committees** provide strategic advice to support the effective management of an organization and/or its sponsored activities.

Organizational Structure: Example A

BEST START METRO LA
Proposed CGB Membership Representation/Propuesta de Representación del CGB (Feb2015)

Organizational Structure: Example B

2. **Operating Policies and Procedures** are guidelines that outline how an organization's day-to-day operations are carried out. This includes functions such as communicating with members to share updates or requests, maintaining a calendar of events, planning, facilitating and documenting meetings, developing and monitoring budgets, and orienting new members.

3. A **Code of Conduct** is a set of rules and regulations that describe what is and is not acceptable or expected behavior for members of organization and those who participate in its sponsored activities. They typically describe expected behavior, based on core organizational values; unacceptable behavior, including language and actions that will not be tolerated; a process for resolving any conflict or issues; and the consequences for code of conduct violations.

Because Best Start community partnerships are committed to being inclusive, the establishment of code of conduct is critical to providing a friendly, safe, and welcoming environment for all, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ability, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and religious affiliation (or lack thereof). Also, community partnerships engage people who represent diverse cultures and lived experiences, which collectively can be a strength. However, to establish clear expectations regarding respectful, civil behavior is especially important in groups where perceptions about appropriate communication and interactions may vary.

See Appendix B for a sample code of conduct.

STEP #2: ASSESS GOVERNANCE CAPACITY

Once group members have solidified their understanding of basic governance practices, they should then assess their governing strengths and challenges. This process will help them accurately gauge the effectiveness of their existing structure, strengthen evaluation skills needed to monitor governance practices, and prioritize capacity building needs.

Key Implementation Steps and Activities

Coordinate a session (or two) to conduct a governance self-assessment process. Community partnerships can use the below checklist as a guide for assessing their governance structure's effectiveness, but please be sure to walk through the components with group members as preparation for inviting their input. This will help to ensure sharing understanding of the information presented and the provision of accurate feedback. Each organization will need to decide for itself what changes, if any, to make in its governance policies and practices based on the self-assessment.

See Appendix C for a Checklist on Assessing the Strength of Governance Structures.

More Key Considerations

After completing the self-assessment checklist, it is also important for group members to consider:

- What they would like to accomplish by improving governance capacity? (What would success look like? What are the intended outcomes or benefits?)

  – *"At the end of this process, participants will **learn / understand** _____."*

  – *"At the end of the process, the Partnership will **achieve / create** _____."*

- How they would like to approach and support building governance capacity. (Which individuals or work groups will take the lead? Who else should be engaged? How will recommendations be developed and approved?)

- What a reasonable timeline is for achieving their goals? (Realistically speaking, how much time is needed to achieve desired outcomes? Are there other timelines or commitments that will impact this work?)

- If they need any additional preparation or support in order to move forward? (Is more training, information or input needed?)

Helpful Tip

Be sure to frame self-assessment in terms that are constructive and relatable to the members of the group.

Examples

**Strengths
vs.
Challenges**

**Assets
vs.
Needed Improvements**

**Roses
vs.
Thorns**

STEP #3: CO-DESIGN AND IMPLEMENT NEW GOVERNANCE POLICIES

Best Start Partnership members are the most qualified to determine what structures and processes would work best for their own organization and communities. Engaging BSCs in co-designing governance policies ensures that a collaborative, community-driven approach is used to update or develop new governance policies, and affords members the opportunity to prioritize areas of needed improvement based on their understanding of what is most critical to their effective functioning and ability to achieve stated goals.

Participation in a co-design process also strengthens group member skills in a host of categories, including *identifying* gaps in governance policies and structures that contribute to tension, conflict and miscommunication; *navigating* problem solving and decision-making processes integral to effective organization management; and *reviewing* reference materials and synthesizing feedback regarding organizational practices as a basis for developing or revising governance policies. Finally, it helps groups *translate* organizational management models and frameworks into real-life community practice.

In addition, it is also important to acknowledge the collective knowledge, talents, and strengths that group members bring to the co-design process is essential to the development of a strong governance structure. Each community member has distinct experiences and gifts. Thus, it is important to emphasize that while the capacity builder may hold or guide the conversation, it is ultimately their *collective community wisdom* that will guide the work and facilitate the change they want to achieve.

Key implementation Steps & Activities

1. **Gather existing governance documents and examples from similar organizations for reference.**
   - Collect and review all existing documents that provide guidelines for how the Partnership should be managed.
   - Research how other groups have articulated their governance policies. This will provide a good range of ideas and style, which the group can adapt and customize to suit their needs.

2. **Decide how governance policies will be written and approved.**
   - Determine who will be responsible for creating written policy drafts and making additional changes. If the bylaws are going to be long or complex, it may be best to divide up the writing tasks and assign different people to write specific sections.
   - Devise a timeline that allows for the gathering of group recommendations, the development of draft policies, and a process for review and approval. Given that governance policies cover a wide range of issues, you may choose to separate out draft development and approval by topic, with the goal of gradually completing all updates over a period of weeks or months.

- Agree upon the process that will be used to review, revise and finalize governance policies. What role will work groups, leadership bodies and the full Partnership play? How will proposed drafts be introduced and reviewed to support thoughtful, informed decision-making?

3. **Solicit input to inform policy drafts and updates.**
   - Facilitate member participation via a detailed reading and review of the partnership's current agreements or bylaws. To do so, make sure you: distribute governance reference materials for advance review, including relevant Partnership documents and examples from other organizations; use discussion prompts to support members' reflection and discussion on what currently exists and works and where gaps exist; and capture feedback, recommendations and agreements in detailed meeting minutes, which will be used as a reference for creating governance policy drafts.
   - Create a "parking lot" of governance areas that need to be addressed more in depth at a later time.

4. **Meet as a group to review draft governance policies.**
   - As noted above, be sure to distribute copies of the proposed policies and relevant reference material well in advance of the meeting. This will ensure that members will have their questions, concerns, or suggested changes ready to share. This will not only save time, but also make it more likely that errors will be identified and that the final version will reflect the group's intentions.
   - To simplify the process, it may be best to assign one person to reading policies aloud, section by section, for approval. Or, if you have a smaller or more casual group, members may take turns reading draft aloud.
   - Ensure the proposed drafts are consistent with other core documents, such as your bylaws, code of conduct, or core values, and any other documents that reflect how the organization operates.
   - Document and present recommendations for additional discussion or amendments. Agree on a timeline for completing requested revisions and schedule a follow-up review session, if necessary.
   - Confirm group agreement to move approved recommendations to next phase of review. Coach members in presenting their recommendations to the appropriate decision-making body for final approval.

Time Commitment

As noted previously, the time allotted for this work varies depending on the partnership members' availability and willingness to take time from other commitments (work, family, school). Depending upon the scope of governance policy development needed, policy drafting and approvals can require anywhere from a few two-hour sessions to biweekly meetings conducted over multiple months. In addition, those who are responsible for creating draft policies based on group input will need to commit to approximately two to three hours of preparation for each meeting.

Resources and Supports

Visual tools such as PowerPoints, written governance reflection prompts, sample reference documents, flipchart paper and markers, and written examples of agreements from other organizations.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS & KEY QUESTIONS

Set specific, time-bound goals.

- Obtain agreement regarding what BSC members wish to work on and when. Ask them to define both short- and long-term capacity building goals: "*What is important to achieve in next three months? Why?*" and "*What areas can wait six or more months?*"

Schedule time to review and update governance policies.

- The periodic review of governance policies will help them remain in the forefront of members' minds. It also provides an opportunity to assess whether they accurately reflect the current direction of the organization, and if changes need to be made.

- Please note that policy amendments can also be suggested at any time by members as long as they adhere to the agreed-upon proposal and review process. This allows groups the flexibility to address concerns and suggestions for improvement whenever an important governance issue arises.

Align governance policies with BSC goals and functions.

- Provide a refresher on the partnership's mission, goals, and strategies to help members determine what decision-making structures, processes, and functions are needed to successfully move the community work forward.

- Emphasize that governance structures and policies are "living agreements" that should be reviewed and amended, as needed, on a regular basis—similar to goals and strategies—in order to adapt to the ever-changing needs of a dynamic organization. As an organization's goals and activities evolve, governance policies should also reflect growth.

- A visual representation of the vision, mission, values, etc. of a group can serve as a helpful reference when exploring their connection to supportive governance policies (see example below).

**Best Start Panorama City & Neighbors
Vision Statement (2017–2020)**

Vision:
We have a vision for the future of Best Start Panorama City & Neighbors that young children ages birth to 5 who live in North Hills East, Panorama City, and North Van Nuys will be safe, healthy, and ready to achieve success in school and in life. Our vision is an alignment with the vision of First 5 LA.

Mission:
Much of our work focuses on the adults (parents, grandparents, and other caregivers) who interact with and care for children birth to 5. We want to support these adults in their role as a child's first teacher. We want families to understand how quickly a child's brain develops in the first 3+ years of life and how they can support that development.

Goal 1:
We want to encourage families to speak, read, and sing with their young children from birth. We will model the importance of reading by reading to children birth to 5 in schools, parks, and community centers.

Goal 2:
We want to support family engagement with local schools and early childhood centers and educators to help ensure children will be ready to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

Goal 3:
We also want to help families keep their own children and other children in the community safe from abuse and neglect.

Goal 4:
We want to work with local agencies and government representatives to advocate for young children to receive the health care, nutrition, and child development services that will help them thrive.

Goal 5:
We want to advocate for increased help in areas where our communities need more services, such as support for families of children with special needs, more access to parks and open space, police services to enhance safety, and services to deliver clean, walkable neighborhoods.

When should governance policies be developed or updated?

It is important to begin establishing a governance structure early in an organization's development. As the organization grows and changes, so should its structure. Thus, the best times to develop or review governance policies are during the organization's initial formation, or when clarification is needed regarding the organization's purpose, or other basic matters relating to how your group operates. Of course, if a group undergoes a change in purpose or organizational structure, it also may make sense to revisit governance policies.

How formal should your governance structure be?

With respect to governance, formality refers to the strict adherence to clearly defined rules and procedures. In contrast, informal governance practices are usually based on shared expectations and norms that have not been established as binding written rules.

The following table can be used as a reference to support group members in determining what the level of formality and detail that is appropriate for their governance structure.

In community-based partnership, a level of conflict or crisis often reveals the need to improve governance practices. However, if at all possible, the task of creating initial structures and policies should be addressed as early as possible. Doing so will reduce the constraints placed on members' time, energy, and motivation if they are working simultaneously on planning and implementing community engagement activities.

Conditions Favoring More or Less Formality in Organizational Structures*		
Condition	**A less formal structure with fewer rules or regulations would be favored when...**	**A more formal structure with detailed rules to guide decision-making would be favored when...**
Current or planned organization size	Very small or select group of decision-makers and implementers	Large number of people engaged in decision-making processes and/or organization has community-wide reach
Stage of organization development	The organization is just starting	The organization is in later stages of development
Volunteer or staff based?	Volunteer-based	Primarily led by paid staff
Prior relationships among members	Many such relationships already exist	Few such relationships already exist
Prior member experience in working together	Many such experiences have occurred	Few such experiences have occurred
Member motivation to be part of the organization	Motivation is high	Motivation is low
Number of organization tasks or issues (broadness of purpose)	There is a single task or issue	There are multiple tasks or issues
Organization size	The organization is small	The organization is large
Organization leadership	The leadership is very experienced	The leadership is less experienced
Timeframe for accomplishing goals	Short-term	Long-term
Urgency for action	There is no particular urgency to take action now	There is strong urgency to take action now

Source: adapted from The Spirit of Coalition Building in
https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/structure/organizational-structure/overview/main

Measuring Success

KEY INDICATORS

There are several partnership member skills that capacity builders looked for as evidence that their capacity building had had an impact. These included:

- The ability to use governance policies or recommended practices as a reference point when issues arise related to decision-making processes or when a conflict occurs within the group.
- Critical reflection and analysis of how to align mission and goals with structures and policies that support these goals.
- Enhanced recognition of the importance and value of diverse representation and collaboration (indicated through verbal commentary and action).
- Ability to seek and foster continuous improvement in their governance structure and practices.
- Confidence to hold one another accountable to the policies and procedures that they collectively agreed to.

PARTNERSHIP RESULTS

By and large, the BSC groups met the intended goal to develop new standard procedures or update existing ones that align with their goals for community change. These communities were able to develop bylaws that were not present before or update existing documents to align with changes their partnership has undergone.

More specifically, governance policies have been updated and documented, including bylaws, codes of conduct, meeting agreements, and organization charts that guide ongoing activities. BSCs have developed new policies and decision-making processes to address the immediate structural gaps and needs of the Partnerships, and have developed and instituted processes to effectively orient members at varying levels of participation. Additionally, consistent record keeping is occurring across Partnership activities to promote transparency, improved reporting and information sharing, and the maintenance of "institutional memory," and accountability policies are in place that are jointly supported by members and partners.

The resulting improved clarity of governance policies and roles helped to increase participation in several Best Start partnerships, especially for newer members who may be tentative about engaging or weary of past confusion and conflict. The clear articulation of leadership roles, elections processes and member eligibility were particularly beneficial in this regard. Well-structured planning and implementation work processes for organizing community events and activities were also appealing to members.

Perhaps most importantly, partnership members feel increased ownership regarding BSC leadership, activities and outcomes as a result of co-designing and implementing governance policies to guide their work. They now have members who are experienced in evaluating governance policies and developing processes to support their work, knowledge can be used within and beyond Best Start.

Major Lessons Learned

What actions, tools or major learnings were most critical to achieving progress?

Time. Allocating adequate time to engage in the building governance capacity is critical. A hurried approach will likely lead to ineffective planning and incomplete work processes. Assessing the level of readiness and commitment of a group before you begin is recommended as guide for deciding the timing, format and structure of capacity building efforts. It will also help group members set reasonable expectations for the work.

Reference materials. Providing examples of relevant governance policies were particularly helpful when introducing key concepts. They were also shared during the co-design process when requested or when a group was not familiar with related practice guidance. However, the importance of adapting guidance to suit community needs was consistently emphasized to avoid direct replication of other structures.

Alignment. Connecting governance structure development with achieving stated group goals helps members to remain grounded in the "big picture" and devise policies that support optimal functioning. Be sure to allocating the necessary time to integrate this element into the process. Otherwise, governance policies may reflect more of a "crisis/conflict" response vs. intentional planning and continuous improvement.

Language equity. Quality interpretation and translation support for languages spoken by all group members is essential. Keep in mind that governance discussions may require more nuanced translation that incorporates conceptual meaning and figurative words (instead of verbatim, word-for-word interpretation). This will help to ensure that the meaning of what is intended or being conveyed is accurately captured.

Relationship building. The process of GOV SP is about developing the "technical knowledge" of how organizations function effectively, but it is also about the development of "soft skills"—building relationships, working collaboratively, building trust, creating teams.

Emphasizing the value of this work. Building governance capacity can be a lengthy and time-consuming task for community partnership members. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge and reaffirm the members' commitment to completing all phases of this work. Uplifting the final products as evidence of their work is helpful for motivation, as is helping members connect with their desire to serve as effective stewards of the Partnership's mission and overall goals.

Recommended Resources

Quick Reference Guides

Community Toolbox, Chapter 9: Developing an Organizational Structure for the Initiative
https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/structure/organizational-structure

Module 2: Organizational Structure (Pathfinder International)
http://www2.pathfinder.org/site/DocServer/Organizational_Structure.complete.pdf?docID=323

Written Documents for Community Groups: Bylaws
https://ohioline.osu.edu/factsheet/CDFS-1570

The Effective Organization: Five Questions to Translate Leadership into Strong Management
https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/library/organizational-effectiveness/
the-effective-organization-five-questions

Robert's Rules Cheat Sheet
http://diphi.web.unc.edu/files/2012/02/MSG-ROBERTS_RULES_CHEAT_SHEET.pdf

Building Capacity for Local Decision-Making: A Series of Learning Guides
Center for the Study of Social Policy https://cssp.org

- Guide 1 - Theory and Purpose of Local Decision-Making
- Guide 2 - Working with Members
- Guide 3 - Setting a Community Agenda
- Guide 4 - Strategies to Achieve Results
- Guide 5 - Financing and Budgeting Strategies
- Guide 6 - Using Data to Ensure Accountability

Partnership Support Team Resource Compilation

- Best Start Broadway Manchester Bylaws
- Best Start West Athens Bylaws
- Best Start Lancaster Code of Conduct
- Best Start Palmdale Code of Conduct

Additional Resource Organizations

University of Kansas Community Toolbox
https://ctb.ku.edu/en

Board Source
https://boardsource.org/board-support/training-education/download-resources-tools/

Center for Non-Profit Management
https://cnmsocal.org

APPENDIX A: ADDRESSING GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES: EXAMPLES FROM BEST START COMMUNITIES

Palmdale

BSC members identified governance as a priority as they were trying to resolve conflict initially attributed to racial tension. However, closer observation revealed that much of the tension within the group was related to a lack of structure. As a result, retreat sessions were scheduled to discuss issues of membership, leadership, structure, and communication. During this time, the group was also undertaking the Learning by Doing process, where they reviewed data to establish their purpose, eventually deciding to focus on increasing access to childcare and preschool for children in the area. The Learning by Doing process provided a helpful opportunity to put new agreements and policies into practice.

Southeast Los Angeles

This Best Start community established bylaws and a mission statement in 2015. However, new members were often not as familiar with these by-laws as long-time leaders. This often resulted in recurring confusion and conflict about Best Start goals and member roles, which contributed to a feeling within the group of being stuck or unable to make progress. In order to move forward and reduce conflict, the Partnership agreed in late 2017 to make updating their governance structure a priority, with the goal of improving communication, decision-making criteria and work processes.

West Athens

Within this community, partnership leaders expressed concern about stakeholders receiving conflicting information regarding BSC goals and opportunities to participate. They attributed this confusion to a lack of clear direction and the need for a unified voice when communicating about their work. Partnership leaders also cited the need for greater clarity and transparency regarding BSC goals, roles, and processes, including regular communication with members and partners. In addition, the efficient management of meeting time to ensure completion of agenda items was a major concern. As a result, the Partnership committed to updating and expanding their bylaws over the course of several months as well as using newly documented and improved policies to effectively orient members.

Central Long Beach

This community partnership had developed a mission statement and by-laws, but neither had been updated since the initiative's launch. While electing new leadership group members and preparing to orient them, it became apparent that existing BSC bylaws were outdated and new decision-making processes were needed to carry out planned activities effectively. In addition, members had raised concerns about inconsistent attendance among leaders, resulting in delayed decision-making and voting processes. As a solution, the Partnership decided to conduct a word-by-word, section by section review of their governance documents. Members also reviewed attendance data and membership criteria to identify inactive leaders and fill vacancies.

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE CODES OF CONDUCT

EXPECTED BEHAVIOR (General Examples)

- Participate in an authentic, positive, and active way. In doing so, you contribute to the health and longevity of this community.

- Exercise consideration and respect in your speech and actions. This includes refraining from demeaning, discriminatory, or harassing behavior and speech.

- Be sensitive to the values, customs, traditions, and cultures of the communities we serve.

- Attempt collaboration before conflict.

- Remember that community space is be shared with members of the public; please be respectful to all and maintain a professional attitude when interacting with others.

- Demonstrate accountability as an individual and team member while dealing with internal business or projects and while serving the community.

- Utilize resources, equipment, and supplies efficiently and with cost awareness.

- Provide ideas for improvement and constructive criticism to the appropriate internal forums for the purpose of improving our work.

CONSEQUENCES FOR NOT UPHOLDING A CODE OF CONDUCT (Best Start Lancaster)

Best Start Lancaster members will not tolerate fighting, swearing, threats, harassment, and similar unprofessional behavior in Best Start-related activities (i.e. meetings, events, conferences) or any other public forum including social media.

Warnings

Members behaving inappropriately toward others will be given up to three verbal or written warnings by Guidance Body Members and/or First 5 LA staff or contractors (i.e. Capacity Builder) to correct the behavior. If the behavior persists or endangers another person's safety, the member will be asked not to return to the Partnership until the situation is reviewed with a mediation panel.

Mediation Panel

In situations when conflict persists, all the affected parties will be asked to participate in one or more mediation sessions with a panel of at least 3 representatives (i.e. First 5 LA staff, contractors, Guidance Body Members or other impartial parties). Individuals serving on the panel cannot have conflict of interests and will receive training on conflict resolution and restorative justice principles.

The purpose of the panel is to listen to each side of the dispute, review the facts of the situation, identify the root cause(s) of the problem, and engage with the affected parties to find solutions to the problem(s). The intent of this panel is not to declare a guilty party and impose punishment but rather to find ways to foster a culture of respect within Best Start. This requires a process of self-reflection, accountability for own actions, restoring those harmed mended relationships, and helping individuals build their capacity to resolve problems in a constructive manner. The recommendations from the panel and agreements by the group will be documented and reviewed periodically, at a frequency determined by the group.

Failure to participate in a mediation process or to agree to most of the resolutions recommended by the mediation panel will result in the individual(s) losing membership status from BSL and being asked not to return to Best Start-related activities.

APPENDIX C: ASSESSING THE STRENGTH OF GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES: A CHECKLIST FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

Leadership and Governance Structure	Yes	No	Unsure
The Community Partnership has a clearly documented strategy in place to achieve its stated goals.			
Elected/appointed leaders have clearly defined roles and responsibilities, which are documented in written job descriptions.			
Elected/appointed leaders have the appropriate skills and knowledge to fulfill their responsibilities.			
Governance policies have established a clear process for nominating, electing, or appointing Partnership leaders.			
All Partnership work groups and committees have a stated purpose with clear lines of decision-making authority and reporting requirements.			
Partnership meetings are run effectively and efficiently.			
Clear management policies and bylaws have been established to support the Community Partnership's effective day-to-day functioning.			
Partnership meetings and actions are accurately documented on a consistent basis.			
Community Partnership management policies and bylaws are periodically reviewed to determine if updates are needed.			
Partnership bylaws set a limit on the number of consecutive terms an elected leader may serve.			
The Partnership regularly assesses its effectiveness through a formal process and develops plans for improvement based on its findings.			

Engaging Members and Partners	Yes	No	Unsure
Community Partnership members have written expectations that clearly outline eligibility requirements and articulate how they support the organization's mission.			
Community members regularly participate in meetings and activities as outlined in written expectations.			
All Community Partnership members and partners receive an orientation to the organization and their role.			
Orientations for members and partners include a review of core values, ethics, and standards for upholding excellence.			
The Partnership has a strategy for recruiting new members that addresses how a representative mix of cultural diversity, talent, and community affiliations will be sought.			
Input from members is used to evaluate the Partnership performance and efficiency.			

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Elected/appointed leaders have the appropriate skills and knowledge to fulfill their responsibilities.			
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The Partnership has a strategy for recruiting new members that addresses how a representative mix of cultural diversity, talent, and community affiliations will be sought.			
Input from members is used to evaluate the Partnership performance and efficiency.			

Cultural Competency	Yes	No	Unsure
Partnership members have a solid understanding of the community they are serving and local stakeholders.			
Partnership leaders, members, and partners are inclusive of the community served.			
The community partnership has assessed its capacity to effectively serve and interact with people equitably across different cultures and backgrounds.			
The Community Partnership has a cultural competency plan or strategy in place (or has considered cultural competency and diversity in the planning activities).			

Financial Budgeting, Reporting, and Monitoring	Yes	No	Unsure
A comprehensive Community Partnership budget is developed and approved each year.			
The use of financial resources is regularly monitored in comparison to established budgets.			

Ethics	Yes	No	Unsure
The Partnership has adopted a clear set of ethical principles, such as a code of ethics, code of conduct, or values statement.			
The organization's code of ethics, code of conduct, or values statement is readily available to all stakeholders (board, staff, volunteers, program participants, donors, and the public).			
Those representing the organization conduct themselves in a respectful, professional manner.			
The organization consistently solicits and receives feedback from the people it serves.			
The organization has a grievance procedure in place that effectively addresses complaints by members, program participants, or other stakeholders.			
The organization has a procedure for reporting and reviewing legal or ethical misconduct by members or partners.			

Conflicts of Interest Policy	Yes	No	Unsure
The policy identifies the types of conduct or transactions that raise conflict of interest concerns.			
The policy sets forth procedures for disclosing and reviewing actual or potential conflicts.			