

CREATING AN EFFECTIVE MULTI-ORGANIZATIONAL ALLIANCE

THE SITUATION

The Alliance for Arts Learning Leadership, formed under the auspices of the Alameda County of Education in Hayward, California, is a broad-based community network of teachers, school administrators, parents, artists, arts and cultural organizations, researchers in higher education, and community members whose purpose is to advance arts learning as an essential component of a meaningful and complete education for all children in Alameda County.

THE ISSUES TO ADDRESS

In 2007, due to increased funding for the arts flowing from the state and local governments, the Alliance was experiencing increased demand for its services. The Alliance Coordinator was over stretched. Alliance participants felt disconnected, and the Alliance was increasingly unable to coordinate the activities of alliance members effectively. To address these issues, the Alliance asked us to help design a new governance structure, including role definition for Alliance participants.

FINDINGS

We benchmarked five effective alliances in different cities around the country, each with a focus in the educational arena as shown in the list below. Alliances for the study were identified by an initial set of interviews to determine those alliances that were regarded by peers and experts in the field as highly effective, long-lasting, and well structured. In assembling our findings we gathered best practice from these alliances, and also drew from our past experience in working with other multi-organization alliances.

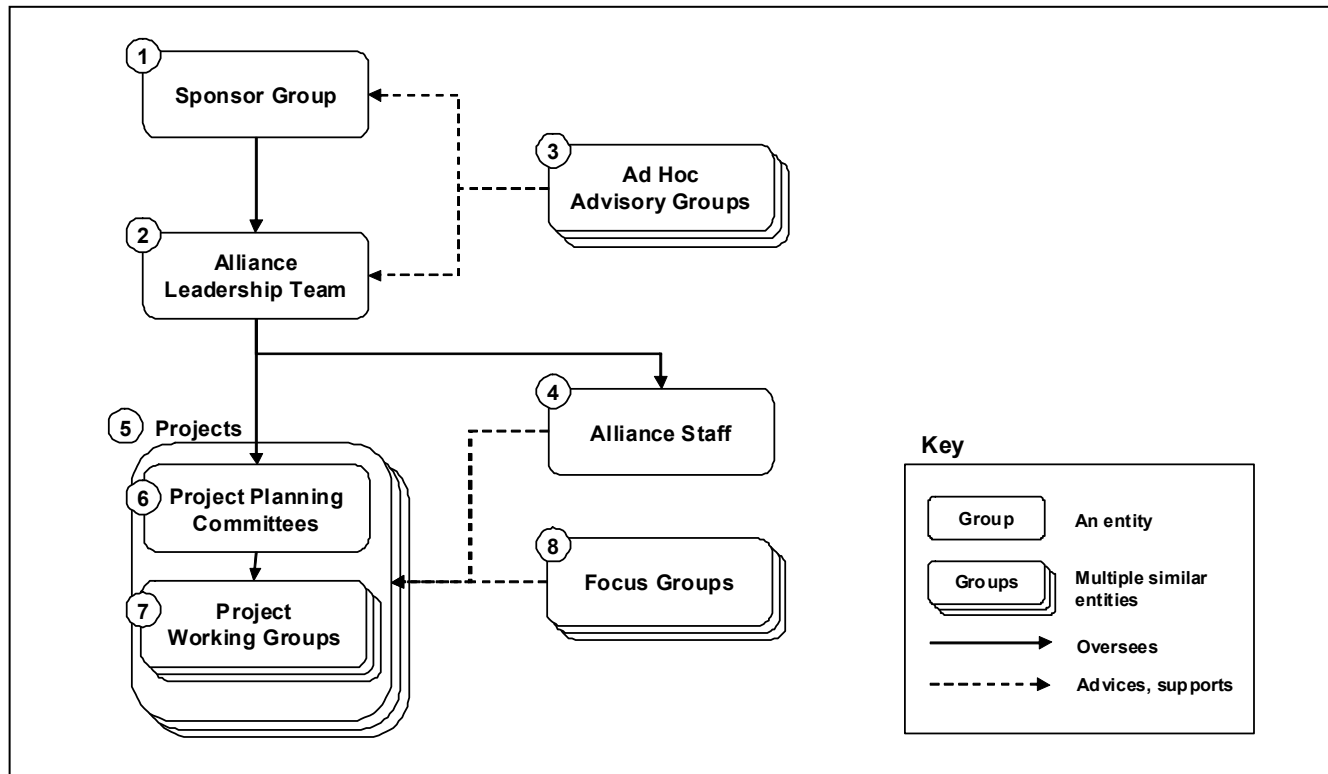
<u>Alliance</u>	<u>Geography</u>	<u>Alliance focus</u>
Big Thought	Dallas	Inspire, empower, and unite children and communities through education, arts and culture
Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education	Chicago	Advance the arts as a vital strategy for improving teaching and learning
National Writing Project	National	Improve student achievement by improving the teaching of writing
Nebraska STARS	Nebraska	Increase the use of assessments for classroom decision making
Oakland Community Organizations	Oakland	Organize the people of Oakland into a powerful force for social change

Through our benchmarking research and interviews, we found a set of principles that was guiding the governance, structure, and roles used by these effective alliances:

1. *Build shared sponsorship*, including key stakeholders with authority over policy relevant, the ability to direct money flow, and a core interest in the alliance’s goals.
2. *Provide joint leadership and support* with a small Alliance Leadership Team named by and funded by the sponsors, along with a small staff to maintain common guidelines and provide support to Alliance Project Groups.
3. *Establish a self-managing project structure*. Have the Alliance Leadership Team define the project focus for each project, along with a measurable project goal and a project end date. Engage project participants by invitation only, making sure that each participant’s mission is closely aligned with the project goal. (In this way, the participants are able to fund their own personnel’s time as they participate on project work.) Require projects to establish their own success metrics, and report on their performance against these metrics to the leadership team. Use performance against metrics as criteria for continued funding of the projects.
4. *Engage the broader community* through ad-hoc advisory groups gathered to inform the Alliance’s leadership, and through focus groups gathered to inform the work of projects. Bias towards participatory decision making, using consensus or majority voting to make key decisions. Communicate actively with the broader community through gatherings and written transmissions, but avoid communication overload by targeting specific communications to different segments of Alliance participants as appropriate.

CHANGES MADE

Based on these findings, the Alliance for Arts Learning Leadership established the following governance structure and participant roles as shown in the diagram and table below.



The table below indicates the responsibilities for each of the roles in the diagram above.

Role	Responsibilities for Each Entity
①	Sponsor Group (Representatives of “member” organizations) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides oversight and guidance for the Alliance • Discusses issues and opportunities • Approves strategy and direction of the Alliance • Sets policy for the Alliance • Meets quarterly
②	Alliance Leadership Team (Participants provided by “member” organizations) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops and recommends strategy and direction for Alliance work • Identifies and prioritizes issues and opportunities • Determines and initiates programs, bringing together partners into planning teams and working groups to develop programs • Provides guidance and support for programs • Convenes planning teams to coordinate work • Provides financial resources (i.e. funding and personnel) for the Alliance • Designates staff to facilitate programs and liaise with the leadership team • Engages in collaborative fundraising and advocacy • Meets monthly to coordinate work and identify areas of collaboration
③	Ad Hoc Advisory Groups (Includes key partners) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created based on need to address specific issues or accomplish defined objectives • Functions as a venue for bringing in new people, ideas, and perspectives • Provides advice and guidance on the strategy and direction of the Alliance or on a specific area of work • Discusses issues and opportunities • Frequency of meetings depends on the nature of the work and is decided by ad hoc advisory group
④	Alliance Staff (Designated by Alliance Leadership Team) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acts as a liaison between the programs and the Alliance Leadership Team • Coordinates and supports programs • Mobilizes program participants • Facilitates the establishment of long term partnerships between organizations and/or individuals • Cultivates professional networks
⑤	Projects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created based on need to address specific issues or accomplish defined objectives • Constituted as defined partnerships between program participants who make explicit commitments to participate • Partners bring financial resources or expertise to the program
⑥	Project Planning Committee <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops, designs, and directs the program • Identifies staff for the program as needed • Establishes working groups of individuals from program participants to advance the programmatic work • Evaluates the program against defined objectives • Makes recommendations to the leadership team based on results of their work • Frequency of meetings depends on the nature of the work and is decided by the program planning committee
⑦	Project Working Groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created based on need to address specific issues or accomplish defined objectives of a program • Performs and executes programmatic work • Convenes focus groups to generate ideas and provide insights • Makes recommendations to the program planning team based on results of their work • Frequency of meetings depends on the nature of the work and is decided by the program working group
⑧	Focus Groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created based on need by program working groups or by recommendation of the program planning team or an advisory group to address specific issues or accomplish defined objectives • Provides ideas and insights to programs

RESULTS

As a result of these changes, the effectiveness of the Alliance for Arts Learning Leadership was enhanced, resulting in:

- An increase in the number of organizations and individuals engaged in Alliance projects and events, due to the ability of the new structure to accommodate and coordinate higher levels of activity
- Greater opportunities for delegation and distribution of the work, allowing for more to be done without increasing the load on the Alliance Coordinator
- Greater buy-in from the sponsoring organizations due to their more material involvement in governance and decision making
- A greater sense of clarity in project goals and roles of participants, resulting in more consistent involvement of participants

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