Governance Guiding Principles

Considerations for designing a governance framework capable of achieving results

Congratulations! If you're here, it means that you and other key leaders are committed to solving homelessness. Having a **strong governance structure** is a key ingredient for reaching zero. Our experience at this stage suggests that there is **no one size fits all** answer to what your governance structure should look like. Rather, what's important is what your decision making structure is designed to **do**, **how** it operates, and **who** is involved. This document will provide you with some **basic principles** to guide the choices you make in designing a governance structure that fits your context.

Background: A Structure Designed for Zero

Since 2015, Community Solutions has sought to identify and replicate operational components among Built for Zero (BFZ) communities, regions, and states that are working to drive an end to homelessness. From our work, we have learned that effective governance structures with coordinated elements are necessary to achieve results. Building from these learnings, and through multidimensional research and formal evaluative efforts, we have developed a community-level Theory of Change that describes the key elements of an effective response. Additionally, we are working to build replicable models for regional and statewide contexts. A strong governance structure should be able to facilitate the implementation and coordination of these key elements.

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What a Governance Structure should be able to do

Every community or state is different, and a fundamental premise of the Built for Zero movement is that solutions must be adapted for each specific context. That said, there are key considerations that we feel apply whenever designing an effective governance structure to achieve zero:

- **Provide standards for how decisions will get made.**
- **Create shared alignment around long-term aims and the milestones necessary for reaching those goals.**
- **Establish a measurement framework and consistency in data collection.**
- **Provide a shared organizing framework with room for localized implementation and adaptation at the community, population, or program levels.**
- **Be formalized enough to maintain consistency in approach, but nimble enough to change course when necessary.**
- **Serve as a feedback loop between leadership and system or frontline work (often at various levels).**
- **Facilitate the alignment of resources and changes to the system.**
- **Include the voices of those impacted by homelessness, including those who are most marginalized.**

- **Build trust with the broader community.**
- **Enable results with integrity that are transparent, accessible, and supported by key stakeholders.**

Who needs to be involved

Based on your specific geography and context, consider the following stakeholder groups. Governance structures often have multiple layers, and various groups are charged with oversight of different pieces of strategy and implementation.

- **Senior/executive leaders** who chart the path and champion the work. They empower their teams and help clear the path. This might include elected officials, CEOs, agency heads, or other senior leadership.
- **State, regional, or local leaders** who lead the work on a day-to-day basis**.** These are the people who translate strategy into action and oversee the critical work of implementation.
- **System-level and frontline staff** who have the most direct knowledge of systems and programs and, therefore, a crucial perspective on opportunities for improvement.
- **Other agencies, departments, community representatives. or anchor institutions** that play a critical role in facilitating connections across systems, programs, or geographies.

How the work should happen

- **Clear leadership.** Once a governance structure is established, it must be maintained and supported by either a backbone organization or coalition of lead partners, ideally with some level of dedicated staffing capacity.
- **System culture.** The culture of the leadership structure recognizes the need for systems and solutions-based thinking that spans across individual or program-level outcomes.
- **Continuous improvement**. Using a mindset of data for improvement, leaders leverage tools from Improvement Science (Driver Diagrams, Plan-Do-Study-Act Cycles, etc.) to make iterative change with ongoing feedback loops.
- **Bias toward action.** Every day longer that a process or system takes is another day someone experiences homelessness. Urgency should be measured with proactive, strategic thinking that yields learning and positive outcomes as quickly as possible through small tests of change that lead to broader systems change.
- **Create a culture of all voices mattering.** People with lived experience of homelessness and those representing BIPOC and other groups should be centered as experts and a part of decision-making tables.

For More Resources

This is an evergreen deck for building Governance Structures. For more resources, or to connect with our team, reach out to Melanie Lewis Dickerson , Director of Large-Scale Change.