

Principles of Formal Co-Leadership Structure

Co-leadership demands a rethinking of the usual hierarchy found in white, male-dominated organizations. Even organizations intentionally committed to diversity can assume this type of leadership structure when they are getting started or growing. Now, however, many of these organizations are moving away from this structure. It's important to note that different organizations are unpacking and distributing the single executive role in a way that best fits each particular organization. However, it is important that shared **principles, motivations, and aspirations** for sharing power across the organization's leadership team are adopted:

1. Planning and Communication

Updating one another frequently and ongoing communication is key — text first, call second, email, (group) messenger fourth, etc., especially because as co-directors we have split the job into fairly distinct domains. Frequent **updating one another** does take more time, but it is time well spent. Forward planning is also vital. In addition to bi-weekly staff meetings (Tuesdays and Thursdays), the Co-leadership team meets every **Monday at 10:30 am** to go through all internal organizational matters, and attends monthly board meetings to report on respective areas of work.

2. Shared Values and Vision

Effective co-leaders share the same ethics, values and vision for the organization. If they're on the same page on that, everything else falls into place. Questions of communication or how they will make decisions together are then just practical matters that can be worked out along the way.

Effective co-leaders thrive on teamwork, collaboration, and mutual respect. Co-leaders should be people who are fully aligned with the organization goals. Each member needs to **trust each** other's perspective even if — in fact, especially if — they don't agree.

3. Shared Leadership Responsibilities

People lead each other rather than everyone looking up to one person. All positions have the opportunity to support leadership concepts like **accountability, autonomy, initiative, experimentation, follow-up, and reporting**. More people have a stake in the decision-making process, cutting down on the time and red tape that can slow work down.

Internal leadership composition and structure are directly **linked to external impact**. Building equity internally extends to organization-wide practices such as compensation and benefits (benefits are equal; Executive Director makes 5% more than the Program and Operations and Finance Directors; performance evaluations are carried out by the Board Governance Committee for the whole Co-leadership team and individual Directors respectively; raises are allocated to all members of the Co-leadership team simultaneously).

Co-leaders are partners who not only practice responsibility and accountability, but also seek input from other staff members, partners through clear goals and timelines.

Maintaining unwavering trust with each other will be important to ensure effectiveness. At the same time, it is understood that the Co-leadership model is defined by the process of experimenting with various methods - *trial and error* - and doing it until the most successful model is identified.

Co-leaders must create a **Decision-Making Guide** so that everyone understands where and how they can make decisions on their own. Institutionalizing shared leadership and equity means giving everyone, not just the co-directors, ***the power to step into their capacity to lead***.

4. Issues of Voices

Shared leadership requires ongoing attention to the issue of voice. And there is the outside world that often expects one voice (ex. Voice of the Founder). Past partners can sometimes be a challenge in that they expect to talk with the person they know. Clear and frequent communication between the leaders is the foundation for their clarity of voice with others. Clear communication with external partners, as well as public messaging on social media/newsletter regarding co-leadership models are essential!



*Compiled and adapted by Tea Rozman on 9/8/2020 from various articles, and
CoLeadership meeting*

5. Commitment to Modeling, Bridging, and Learning Together

Effective co-leaders' innate approach should be collaborative and collective with a strong commitment to learning together. Our work revolves around elevating the voices of immigrant communities, and is closely linked to our concern with the conscious, responsible use of power, and the need to shift our organizations' internal practice behavior and culture to reflect the world that we are committed to creating.

We understand that the future is unknown and unpredictable. Therefore, including grace, patience and adaptability when building capacity to maneuver in complex environments and inequitable systems are essential.

In order for the organization to benefit from different personalities, competences and leadership styles working with a leadership coach is essential to ensure that harmonious and collaborative way of working is always preserved.