

# **Linked Learning Alliance**

## *Background and Evolution of Alliance Governance*

### **I. Setting the Stage**

The Linked Learning Alliance is a coalition of educators, policymakers, industry, and community stakeholders dedicated to improving California's high schools by preparing students for postsecondary education *and* careers, both objectives and not just one or the other. The Alliance has five major goals:

1. Build awareness and understanding of Linked Learning
2. Expand student access to high quality pathways – locally, regionally, and statewide
3. Leverage resources and expertise to promote Linked Learning
4. Develop and advocate for policies supporting pathways
5. Boost Alliance membership to expand support for Linked Learning throughout California

Since its inception in May 2008, the Linked Learning Alliance has grown to include more than 140 organizations and individuals—a “surprising alliance” of the state’s primary secondary and postsecondary systems, teachers unions, educational administrators and school boards, advocacy organizations, state and local chambers of commerce, industry and labor representatives, and concerned individuals. The Alliance is advancing its goals through the work of three working groups: 1) Policy, 2) Building Awareness, and 3) Pathway Development.

With support from The James Irvine Foundation, ConnectEd: The California Center for College and Career has helped develop, lead, and manage the Alliance’s work. As the Alliance expands and matures, the Foundation and ConnectEd have continued to engage in discussions about how best to strengthen the Alliance’s governance and staffing to achieve the Alliance’s objectives and better serve all of its diverse members.

In September, a small group of members active in the Alliance met to explore possible options for transitioning ConnectEd from the managing agent for the Alliance to an active member, with the Alliance assuming independent responsibility for leadership, governance, and staffing. The group sought first to establish some underlying principles that could guide the design of the Alliance’s governance and operations and second to propose some possible options for moving forward.

In October, a larger group of about 30 active Alliance members met to review and refine the recommendations of the initial planning group. They are recommending that the Alliance form a leadership council that would establish a formal governance structure for the Alliance and finalize a strategy for leading and managing the work of the Alliance. To help facilitate the Alliance’s ongoing work, The James Irvine Foundation has graciously offered to help support the future governance and staffing of the Alliance. Some guiding principles and organizational options are summarized below.

## **II. Underlying Principles for Alliance Governance and Leadership**

1. Foster and support a cross sector alliance with student success at the center of all Alliance work.
2. Represent all members of the Alliance and give voice to the broad movement—expanding and amplifying the Alliance’s contribution to advancing pathways throughout the state.
3. Give high priority to convening Alliance members, developing and communicating the Alliance’s goals, educating policy makers and advocating for policy changes.
4. Facilitate securing sufficient commitment, involvement and resources to achieve Alliance goals.
5. Strive for simplicity and flexibility.
6. Promote transparency of decision-making to all Alliance members.
7. Promote collaboration among members, recognizing and supporting the varied interests of the individual members.

## **III. Options for Implementation**

***The underlying principles are based on the agreed-upon goals of the Alliance. These principles, and the goals that they reflect, are intended to inform the Alliance’s structure and operations.***

- A leadership council comprised of members of the Alliance should oversee the work of the Alliance
- Essential functions would include:
  - Ongoing administration and management
  - Convening the Alliance
  - Facilitating regular communications among members
  - Communicating and promoting the goals and positions of the Alliance
  - Analyzing and developing policy
  - Advocating on issues that affect the Alliance as appropriate
  - Conducting other work of the Alliance (as defined by its leadership council)
  - Stewarding membership growth and expansion

Options for the organization’s structure follow, along with recommendations for implementing the new organization.

### **A. Proposed Structural Options**

#### **Option 1: A Member-Driven “Near-Virtual” Organization**

- a. Much of the work is done by members
- b. 1-2 staff (either employees or contractors)
- c. Spokespeople for the Alliance would be members, not staff
- d. No new 501C(3) would be created; an existing foundation would provide the legal and financial framework

- e. A leadership council would provide oversight

**Option 2: A Member-Driven Organization with Designated Strong Leadership**

- a. Designated leadership presence is “public face” of the Alliance who facilitates members as primary spokespeople
- b. Strong staff (contractors and Alliance Staff)
- c. Membership drives policy
- d. No new legal organization is established
- e. Fiscally sponsored by a partner organization
- f. As an initial step this option would not establish a 501c3, leaving the option to do so in the future if needed

**B. Leadership Council**

- a. The recommendation is that a Leadership Council should be granted authority to determine a governance structure for the Alliance. This group would initially be composed of active members of the Alliance and represent each of the major stakeholder groups: K-12, each of the three public post-secondary sectors, teachers and administrators, intermediary organizations leading Linked Learning reform efforts, industry, philanthropy, and community-based and statewide advocacy groups. The Leadership Council would be drawn from the active Alliance members who have been involved in the Linked Learning Advisory Committee which has been regularly convened by the Irvine Foundation and the co-chairs of the Alliance working groups.
- b. This Leadership Council will consult and decide on the best way to ensure the ongoing leadership needs of the organization are met:
  - Nominating process
  - Election process
  - Terms and term limits
  - Size of leadership council
  - Committee structure
  - Composition of committees
- c. Once the organization is established, it is recommended that the leadership council also develop the following (this is not meant to be an exhaustive list):
  - Policies and bylaws
  - Budgets and financial controls
  - Systems and processes to assure transparency of deliberations and decisions
  - Membership levels (and membership fee structure)