

# CONSORTIUM GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE TO MAXIMIZE IMPLEMENTATION SUCCESS

November 2015

In the following report, Hanover Research provides a summary of in-depth interviews with representatives of 17 consortia formed to take advantage of California's Adult Education Block Grant to develop a regional plan for adult education, known as Assembly Bill (AB) 86. Interviewees shared details about the governance structure used in their consortium, strategies for ensuring engagement and accountability, and future plans for the grant's implementation phase, AB 104.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

### INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings from a series of in-depth interviews to gather information from representatives of other consortia formed in response to California's Adult Education Block Grant program for regional adult education. These consortia are in the process of transitioning from the grant's planning phase, known as Assembly Bill (AB) 86, to the implementation phase, AB 104. In September 2015, Hanover Research spoke with individuals involved in 17 consortia across the state. During these interviews, Hanover asked questions related to governance structure, engagement, accountability, and plans for the transition to the implementation phase.

### KEY FINDINGS

- **Most consortia used a Steering Committee of representatives from community college and school district member organization during the planning phase.** The Steering Committee was responsible for satisfying the requirements of AB 86 and typically reached decisions through consensus, without a formal voting mechanism. The committee meetings proved important in building a relationship of trust across organizations. Some consortia also established an Executive Committee with administrators from each member organization. The Executive Committee, while not directly involved in the day-to-day decision making, provided a valuable opportunity to create buy-in for the goals of the consortium.
- **Many consortia formed workgroups during the planning phase as a way to bring in stakeholders with expertise in a particular area and to complete more detailed planning work.** Workgroups also facilitated involvement and participation from various stakeholders, including instructional staff members. However, some consortia that used workgroups noted a challenge of keeping the larger group up-to-date on the progress and decisions coming out of the workgroups.
- **All consortia are in the process of formalizing their governance policies and procedures to comply with AB 104, and most do not anticipate making dramatic changes to their governance structure.** The majority will continue to make decisions through a Steering Committee or similar body. However, consortia are creating written policies on committee member appointments and voting. As part of this shift, several consortia are changing or considering a change in the organization that serves as the fiscal agent. The role and responsibilities of the fiscal agent are also being formalized. Similarly, several consortia are creating formal director and/or coordinator positions to facilitate work during the implementation phase.
- **Most consortia noted that member organizations were self-motivated to participate in the planning phase to ensure that their organization receives funds and support.** During the implementation phase, some consortia will support engagement by formalizing committee members' involvement in the consortia

through job descriptions, creating a system for designating a proxy, and requiring a quorum for voting to occur. Several consortia rely on a Program Coordinator to ensure that all member organizations are engaged in the process.

- **Community partners without active adult education programs have been difficult to keep engaged.** Generally, organizations that actively engage in or provide adult education programming are the most committed. Consortia have attempted to keep other community members and partners engaged by organizing forums and summits to facilitate relationship building and to disseminate information about their goals and progress. Often many types of community partners are involved, such as workforce development, the library, mental health services, the food bank, and correctional facilities.
- **Consortia are currently working to formalize processes for notifying the public about meetings and decision making.** Many plan to use a website for the purposes of keeping the public aware of the group's meetings, planning documents, and votes. Some are in the process of creating a website while others completed this work during the planning phase. Public engagement is increasingly important due to the requirements of AB 104.
- **None of the consortia have a formal accountability plan in place.** However, many noted that they are planning to incorporate accountability assurances into their new by-laws, necessary for AB 104. Generally, consortia are planning to use the documentation and compliance requirements set out in AB 104 to ensure accountability. Few consortia discussed any plans for program assessment and evaluation. Those that did mentioned that finding a common assessment tool will be a challenge, as there is little overlap across member organizations.

## SECTION I: GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

### PLANNING PHASE (AB 86)

During the initial planning phase (AB 86), many consortia used an informal governance structure to bring member organizations together and complete the necessary planning tasks. Typically, a small group of individuals representing each member organization formed a **Steering or Leadership Committee**, with a designated program coordinator, chair, or co-chairs overseeing the group and completing administrative tasks in some cases. The committee's chair and/or coordinator often came from the member designated as the fiscal agent for AB 86. The Steering Committee members were not formal appointments; rather, the group often formed in an organic way out of necessity to bring together representatives from each organization. The number of representatives from each member organization often varied, with some consortia including only one point-person from each organization and others involving multiple staff members from some or all organizations. In some cases, this was the first time many of the organizations worked together on a common project, and the planning phase work helped to build relationships across organizations. Decision making and voting, if formally conducted at all, often took place within the Steering Committee. More typically, Steering Committees reached decisions during the planning phase through consensus, without a formal voting mechanism.

In some cases, the Steering Committee reported to an **Executive Committee** of administrative-level individuals from each partner organization, such as the district superintendents and college presidents. Typically, the Executive Committee served in a supervisory role, reviewing reports, outcomes, and decisions from the Steering Committee. Several interviewees noted that having a formal Executive Committee created more buy-in among the administration for the goals and work of AB 86 and AB 104 moving forward.

*"We met with [the Executive Committee] very early on in the process, and their buy-in to what we were doing allowed for their staff and teachers and administrators to come to these work groups regularly."*

**Smaller consortia with only a few member organizations often did not establish a formal committee** with voting and decision-making guidelines during the planning phase. Rather, the work related to AB 86 may have fallen to two or three individuals. In one case, the planning phase work was primarily completed by one representative from each of the two member organizations and a full-time program coordinator.

On the other end of the spectrum, **consortia with a large number of member organizations often had several layers of hierarchy**, including the Steering and Executive Committees described above, as well as sub-committees or working groups that focused on particular aspects of AB 86, such as English as a second language (ESL) education, apprenticeships, and short-term career technical education. These work groups often, but not always, aligned with the five goals outlined in AB 86. Some consortia also created additional workgroups

around areas such as marketing, curriculum alignment, or assessment. Several interviewees noted that splitting into workgroups allowed for those with expertise in a particular area to effectively contribute to the planning process. Workgroups also facilitated involvement and participation from various stakeholders, including instructional staff members.

However, some consortia that used workgroups noted that it was often a challenge to keep the larger group up-to-date on the progress and decisions coming out of the workgroups. When specified, most consortia had between five and seven workgroups during the planning phase and plan to keep these groups during AB 104. However, one consortium specifically noted that it plans to shift the workgroups to focus on areas related to the creation or expansion of individual programs.

### SHARED/COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE MODEL

The Rio Hondo Adult Education Regional Consortium, a group of one community college district and four school district members in the greater Los Angeles metro area, implemented a unique governance model to encourage shared leadership and workload responsibilities during the planning phase. The consortium’s Executive Board consists of five representatives, one from each member organization, and is responsible for fiscal, hiring, and planning decisions. The Board also includes **one spot that rotates between the three non-member partner organizations**.

*“Our approach towards this collaborative governance structure has enabled us to maintain relationships, but also to share the wealth in terms of labor, and also find out more about our respective sites.”*

Representatives from partner organizations serve on the Board for four-month rotations. The rotating partner representative must consult and reach consensus with the other two partners for any formal Board votes. This structure was created to give the partners a *proportionate* voice at the Executive Board table. The consortium was concerned about funding going outside of the region and created the rotating partner position on the Board as a compromise.

The **Executive Board chair position rotates** between the five representatives from member organizations every four months. The chair’s primary responsibility is to facilitate and lead meetings. This structure reflects the consortium’s focus on collaboration and shared governance. During the first six months of the planning process, the consortium’s community college district took on the bulk of the “heavy lifting” and organizing. Once the rotating chair position was implemented, the work became more distributed. A secondary benefit of the rotating chair position was that it allowed members to visit and become more familiar with each of the campuses and schools, as meeting locations shifted along with the chair rotation. However, this model did result in some loss of momentum and continuity with each rotation. The collaborative model also can result in long meetings to allow for consensus making. The consortium recognizes that it may take longer than most to make decisions, but it values inclusion, collaboration, and relationships.

### EXTERNAL CONSULTANTS AND FACILITATORS

Several consortia discussed the use of external consultants during the planning process. In some cases, consortia saw it as an advantage to not rely *too* heavily on consultants. One leader within the Sierra Joint Consortium (SJC), a group of one community college and three adult schools west of Sacramento, specifically stated that doing the bulk of the planning work without an external consultants was valuable both fiscally, in saving and rolling over planning grant funds, and for building relationships within the consortium. The SJC primary contact also noted that “we made more traction by keeping ourselves closer to the work instead of abdicating to somebody else to think about it and discover things that we’ve discovered on our own.” Others noted that consultants made it possible to complete the large amount of work necessary during the planning phase, when group participants had to maintain the responsibilities of their full-time position. The table below lists several examples of how consultants were used.

**Figure 1.1: Examples of External Consultants**

CONSORTIUM	USE OF EXTERNAL CONSULTANTS
<p><b>Sierra Joint Consortium</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hired one part-time consultant on a contracted scope of work to help the group stay on task, set meeting agendas, and complete some of the writing components. The consultant is retired and previously worked in a college adult education program.</li> <li>• Hired a web designer to create and manage its local website, Sierra ASSETS (Adult Student Support Education and Training Services)</li> <li>• Plan to hire a part-time consultant to completed additional background research work during AB 104.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ventura County Adult Education Consortium</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hired consultant group WestEd to help facilitate the planning grant phase and give advice.</li> </ul>
<p><b>San Mateo County Adult Education Consortium</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hired a consultant with past experience in the local area to facilitate the planning phase. The consultant was able to bridge the gap between the member organizations and had some familiarity with the landscape already.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Inland Adult Education Regional Consortium</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hired an independent facilitator to guide the Steering Committee meetings. The facilitator previously worked with some committee members on other projects, so there was existing buy-in to her process, which was described as a “Technology of Participation” method.</li> </ul>

## CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Most consortia cited the unexpectedly large amount of work and time needed to complete the planning phase as their most significant challenge. This was a hurdle for both large and small groups. Smaller consortia often struggled with the sheer volume of work required by AB 86 given the limited number participating staff members, while larger consortia struggled to schedule time for everyone to come together. Several noted that while finding time to meet and reach consensus was one of the biggest challenges, having regular and frequent contact with the other member organizations during the planning phase created strong linkages and relationships across the organizations. Thus, while challenging, in retrospect the planning phase work and meetings resulted in a foundation of trust and understanding across the group.

*“We’re getting deep into the work, and we realized there’s more work there, in aligning, for instance, the ESL curriculum, the ESL curriculums with the college curriculum and college assessment.”*

One mid-sized consortium of one community college and five school districts had an especially informal process during the planning phase with no formal decision-making guidelines or organizational structure. As a result, the planning document was created by a few individuals and lacked transparency and inclusion. The planning coordinator noted that “there was a scramble at the end because the work wasn’t distributed...it was non-inclusive, non-transparent, and ineffective.” The consortium is planning to make big changes during the implementation phase to comply with AB 104 and foster collaboration and greater involvement.

## IMPLEMENTATION PHASE (AB 104)

In most cases, consortia are not planning many dramatic changes to their governance structure, especially if they already have a formal Steering or Leadership Committee from their work on AB 86. **Formalizing governance policies and processes is the overarching theme in terms of changes for the implementation phase.** All of the interviewees discussed the governance policy changes that will be necessary to comply with AB 104 during the implementation phase. Primarily, consortia are working to define and write up their voting rules as well as to change the representation from each member organization in the Steering or Leadership Committee. For example, several consortia need to reduce or increase representation from particular member organizations to comply with AB 104. In some cases, committee members need to be formally appointed by their organization, rather than the less formal gathering of representatives used previously for AB 86. **Several consortia are also extending formal representation to the county department of education (DOE)** and bringing a DOE representative on as a formal member of the Steering or Leadership Committee. Increased transparency and public involvement, discussed in greater detail in Section II of this report, is also a significant component of the implementation phase.



### SHIFT IN FISCAL AGENT

As part of the transition to AB 104, many consortia are re-evaluating which organization will serve as the fiscal agent. In some cases, this is simply an affirmation to keep the same fiscal agent as during the AB 86 planning phase. However, several consortia are choosing to shift the responsibility. One consortium is still considering if it should implement a model where funds are distributed by the state directly to institutions according to their plan. Another highlighted the importance of having a strong fiscal agent to ensure that funds are used as intended, rather than simply disseminating the money out to the organizations without follow-up. A different consortium is shifting the fiscal agent responsibility to the county DOE, as the organization has a strong understanding of K-12 accountability rules and existing relationships with the school districts.

### NEW POSITIONS AND DEFINITION OF ROLES

Several consortia are planning to either create or formalize full-time positions to support the implementation phase, including consortium directors, outreach coordinators, and other support staff positions. In some cases, these positions may already exist from the planning phase but will be formalized moving forward. For example, consortia may be writing position descriptions to establish a clearer understanding of roles and responsibilities. In other cases, consortia are hiring new positions not used during the planning phase.

*“We’re looking into hiring a director that has experience in both adult and community college.”*

### MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU)

The North County Adult Education Consortium, north of San Diego, is a small group with one community college and three school districts. The consortium is in a unique situation for the implementation phase, as the school districts have memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with the community college to provide adult education services. As such, the college is solely responsible for administering adult education in the consortium. During the planning phase, a group of three individuals, one from the college, one from one of the school districts, and a project coordinator based at the college, met to make decisions and complete the requirements of AB 86. They consulted with workgroups of faculty members that focused on each area of the plan.

In transitioning to the implementation phase, the consortium is struggling to decide if it should even have a formal governance and voting structure. The MOUs give the community college authority to make decisions and only require the college to consult with the school districts moving forward. However, the college will need to implement a process for notifying the public to meet with AB 104 regulations. The college has a long history of coordinating with the local school districts to provide adult education and views the MOUs as a positive aspect of the consortium. A representative from the college noted that the MOUs make decision making easy, without competition for resources. As a result, the college is able to focus in on how best to serve the community.

## SECTION II: ENGAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

### ENGAGEMENT

Generally, during the planning phase, consortium members were primarily engaged in the process through participation in the Steering or Leadership Committee meetings. Given that many consortia used a collaborative decision-making process, committee members needed to attend to reach a consensus. Several interviewees noted that organizations were self-motivated to participate to ensure that their organization received funding for programs. During the implementation phase, many plan to make meeting attendance and voting more formal, creating quorum requirements, for example. One consortium's committee members requested formal release time from their positions to participate or had participation added to their job description. Along the same lines, several noted that engagement was possible because of the support of administrators at the member organizations.

*"It's in the members' best interests to represent our clients, our students, and our district and work together."*

At times, meeting scheduling and attendance were barriers to engagement, as committee members were often busy with other responsibilities throughout the year, especially during assessment periods or the start of school. One consortium recognized that schedule conflicts do happen and made a point to e-mail meeting minutes and "homework" to those unable to attend. Several consortia plan to or have already written guidelines for sending an official designee/proxy should a committee member be unable to attend a meeting. This allows voting to occur even when scheduling conflicts arise.

### COORDINATOR POSITION

At least two of the consortia rely on a program/project/planning coordinator to ensure that all of the member organizations are engaged. One coordinator has regular, individual meetings with each member of the Executive Committee. Over time, these meetings have helped to establish a strong working relationship and increased awareness of the consortium's decisions, activities, and outcomes. Another coordinator is responsible for going out to each campus to meet with faculty and administrators as a way to provide two-way feedback on the planning and implementation process. Several interviewees noted that having a person dedicated to the consortium's work and goals is invaluable in ensuring engagement and also making sure that administrative tasks are completed. The coordinator also often sits on each workgroup and can facilitate participation by other stakeholders as well. Some consortia rely on external consultants to function in this role and coordinate meetings and ensure engagement.

## *COMMUNITY PARTNERS*

**Many consortia struggle to keep community partners and other non-member school districts without active adult education programs engaged.** Generally, organizations that actively engage in or provide adult education programming are the most involved. Several interviewees noted that school districts without adult education programs or those that do not currently invest much in their adult education programs are difficult to engage. In one case, the consortium relied on the county DOE to make the initial connection to a school district without an adult education program with which member organizations did not have a prior relationship. In another case, the coordinator paid special attention to a school district with a small and relatively inactive adult education program. The coordinator requests quarterly reports on progress made toward relevant goals of the consortium to ensure that the district is keeping up.

Consortia often use community meetings or forums as a way to engage with stakeholders. During the initial planning phase, one consortium held five in-person forums and one virtual (webinar) meeting with community organizations across the region. Others have organized a single, larger-scale meeting, or summit, as a way to bring together community partners. The goal of these meetings is typically to educate participants on the mission and past achievements of the consortium and to solidify commitments and momentum. Several consortia noted the importance of engagement with the local Workforce Development or Investment Board in particular. This organization often has existing relationships across the region and can be a valuable resource for work in adult education. However, consortia also seek to engage with a wide variety of community organizations, including the library, mental health services, the food bank, and correctional facilities.

One consortium covering several rural counties and 11 member organizations created both a Leadership Governance Group and a Practitioners Group during the planning phase. The Practitioners Group includes staff from partner organizations, such as the United Way, Cal Works, public health agencies, and local non-profits. Historically, these organizations have worked behind the scenes to informally refer individuals to appropriate services. The Practitioner's Group was created as a way to formalize this referral system and bring together community partners.

## *TEACHER/FACULTY ENGAGEMENT*

**Several consortia noted that having strong teacher and faculty involvement is one of the most important aspects of the implementation phase.** Consortia have used or plan to use multiple strategies for ensuring teacher and faculty engagement, such as the following:

- **Teacher-led workgroups** to bring together instructional staff from the various adult education programs currently offered. Teachers are recruited or selected by their program director to participate. In general, workgroups frequently include faculty and teachers. In one consortium, each workgroup has two chairs, one faculty member from the community college and one teacher from a school district.

- **Ongoing implementation meetings** for instructional staff to come together and collaborate on program design pieces. These groups also assist with implementing on-the-ground changes in the classrooms.
- **Creation of ESL professional learning communities** to engage with instructional staff members and work on program and curriculum alignment within ELS programs across the consortium.
- **Use of Faculty Senate to recruit faculty members** in basic skills disciplines to take an active role in the planning and implementation process. For example, one college does not have a formal non-credit adult education program, so career tech, math, and English faculty members liaised with teachers in the K-12 school districts' adult schools. Engaging with the Faculty Senate also provided the consortium leadership with the opportunity to share their objectives and plans with the faculty.

### *PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT*

Many interviewed consortium members mentioned the new requirements for public notification with AB 104. Consortia plan to begin to more formally open up their meetings and decision-making process to the public. Several noted that they will advertise their meetings to ensure that the public are aware that they are welcome. Meetings may be publicized in district or college newsletters or on a consortium's website. One consortium suggested that it is considering setting aside a period for public comments at the beginning of each meeting.

Many consortia cited the creation of a website for the purposes of keeping the public aware of the group's meetings, planning documents, and decision making. Some are in the process of creating a website, while others completed this work during the planning phase. Websites typically contain meeting minutes, calendars and agendas for future meetings, contact information, and any formal documents or reports. One consortium is planning to use its website as a tool to reach and communicate with students as well.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

Most consortia are currently in the process of developing an accountability plan as part of the implementation phase. As such, many noted that this area is “a work in progress” or something that they simply have not focused their energy on yet. Consortia are planning to incorporate accountability assurances into their new by-laws for AB 104. One consortium plans to include a formal procedure for reporting on financial and project-related benchmarks during each monthly committee meeting. As discussed above, several are also formalizing roles and responsibilities as a way to both ensure that there is time for engagement with the group and also to make individuals accountable. Generally, consortia are planning to use the documentation and compliance requirements set out in AB 104 to ensure accountability.

*“Up until recently, there hasn’t been a lot of accountability. That’s partly because there weren’t any rules or procedures in place.”*

## ASSESSMENT

Like accountability measures, consortia are in the process of creating a formal assessment plan for programs. Several noted that they are also awaiting further guidance from the state on specific assessment metrics that will be required. However, some progress is being made. Notably, at least two consortia have identified finding a common assessment tool as a challenge for implementing an assessment plan. One consortium found that there are 10 different assessment tools being used across member organizations. Finding overlap between these is proving to be difficult. Another consortium plans to create a “crosswalk” for the various assessments used in the region.

Several consortia also mentioned initial plans for creating a system for sharing and tracking data, including assessments. One consortium is consulting with staff at each member organization to ensure that everyone has adequate technology resources to make this happen.

## APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY

Hanover Research conducted in-depth interviews with individuals from 17 different consortia. Two asked to remain anonymous.

- **Steve Radford**, Regional Director for College/Career Prep & Adult Education, Antelope Valley Union High School District
  - Antelope Valley Consortium
- **Bill Bettencourt**, Principal, Placer School for Adults
  - Sierra Joint Consortium
- **Kirsten Arps**, Planning Coordinator, Hartnell Community College District (CCD)
  - Salinas Valley Adult Education Consortium
- **Russell Castaneda-Calleros**, Director of Government and Community Relations, Rio Hondo CCD
  - Rio Hondo Region Adult Education Consortium
- **Emma Diaz**, Project Coordinator, San Bernardino CCD
  - San Bernardino CCD Consortium
- **Michael Gilmartin**, Dean of Instructional Planning, Monterey Peninsula CCD
  - Monterey Peninsula Regional Consortium
- **Kay Hartley**, Principal, FSUSD Adult School
  - Solano Community College Consortium
- **Sue Lorimer**, Vice Chancellor of Education and Technology, Los Rio CCD
  - Capital Adult Education Regional Consortium (Los Rios)
- **Tim Harrison**, Dean for Athletics and Off-Site Programs, Ventura County CCD
  - Ventura County Adult Education Consortium
- **Tessa Miley**, Grants Program Administrator, Butte-Glenn CCD
  - Butte-Glenn Consortium
- **Andreea Serban**, Vice Chancellor for Education and Technology, Contra Costa CCD
  - Contra Costa Adult Education Consortium
- **Tim Doyle**, Assistant Director, San Mateo Adult School
  - Adult-Education Career and College Leadership (ACCEL) San Mateo County
- **Kate Maher**, Project Director, Shasta-Tehama-Trinity Joint CCD
  - Northern California Adult Education Consortium
- **David Norton**, Coordinator of Development Education, Cooper Mountain CCD
  - Morongo Basin Consortium
- **Nikki Schaper**, Interim Dean, MiraCosta CCD
  - MiraCosta Regional Consortium

Though conversational in nature, the interviews were guided by a series of pre-defined questions:

- What does your consortium's organizational structure look like?
- Why is the consortium organized in this way?
- What are advantages of this structure?
- What are disadvantages of this structure?
- Are you considering any governance structure changes for the implementation phase?
  - If yes, why?
- How do you ensure engagement and participation among all members of the consortium?
- How are you defining and documenting accountability as it relates to decision making, project compliance, transparency, and responsibility to all impacted by project implementation?

## PROJECT EVALUATION FORM

Hanover Research is committed to providing a work product that meets or exceeds partner expectations. In keeping with that goal, we would like to hear your opinions regarding our reports. Feedback is critically important and serves as the strongest mechanism by which we tailor our research to your organization. When you have had a chance to evaluate this report, please take a moment to fill out the following questionnaire.

<http://www.hanoverresearch.com/evaluation/index.php>

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