Organizing Shared Equity Leadership

Four Approaches to Structuring the Work

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Organizing Shared Equity Leadership: Four Approaches to Structuring the Work

Elizabeth Holcombe

Senior Postdoctoral Research Associate,
Pullias Center for Higher Education
University of Southern California

Adrianna Kezar

Dean's Professor of Leadership;
Wilbur-Kieffer Professor of Higher Education; and
Director, Pullias Center for Higher Education
University of Southern California

Jude Paul Matias Dizon

Research Assistant, Pullias Center for Higher Education
University of Southern California

Darsella Vigil

Research Fellow
American Council on Education

Natsumi Ueda

Research Assistant, Pullias Center for Higher Education
University of Southern California

About the Study

With generous support from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundation, the American Council on Education (ACE) and the Pullias Center for Higher Education at the University of Southern California (USC) partnered to conduct a study of shared equity leadership team structures. This effort benefits the higher education sector by filling a critical gap—providing a fuller understanding of what it means when leaders share leadership in service of equity goals. This project consisted of semi-structured interviews with groups of leaders at four institutions representing different institutional types, contexts, and regions, allowing us to learn more about shared equity leadership and the structures that support it.

About the American Council on Education

The American Council on Education (ACE) is a membership organization that mobilizes the higher education community to shape effective public policy and foster innovative, high-quality practice. As the major coordinating body for the nation's colleges and universities, our strength lies in our diverse membership of more than 1,700 colleges and universities, related associations, and other organizations in America and abroad. ACE is the only major higher education association to represent all types of U.S. accredited, degree-granting institutions: two-year and four-year, public and private. Our members educate two out of every three students in all accredited, degree-granting U.S. institutions.

About the Pullias Center for Higher Education Research

One of the world's leading research centers on higher education, the Pullias Center for Higher Education at the USC Rossier School of Education advances innovative, scalable solutions to improve college outcomes for underserved students and to enhance the performance of postsecondary institutions. The mission of the Pullias Center is to bring a multidisciplinary perspective to complex social, political, and economic issues in higher education. The Center is currently engaged in research projects to improve access and outcomes for low-income, first-generation students, improve the performance of postsecondary institutions, assess the role of contingent faculty, understand how colleges can undergo reform in order to increase their effectiveness, analyze emerging organizational forms such as for-profit institutions, and assess the educational trajectories of community college students.

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Introduction

Even after decades of programmatic efforts and interventions, institutions still struggle to find ways to make a difference in the success of racially minoritized, low-income, and first-generation students, whose populations are increasing on college campuses. Higher education remains inequitable, and most institutions have not made the transformational changes necessary to create truly inclusive environments and equitable outcomes for students. A critical component to realize such transformation is the role of institutional leadership at all levels, from the president to deans to staff and faculty. Leadership defines the values, directions, and priorities of a campus (Birnbaum, Bensimon, and Neumann 1989; Kezar, Carducci, and Contreras-McGavin 2006). This includes establishing the willingness and ability to identify, develop, and implement a student success agenda that puts equity front and center. However, there are few guidelines for higher education leaders who want to scale deep, meaningful, and lasting change to the policies, practices, and structures that have long sustained inequity on their campuses and in the higher education system at large.

In *Shared Equity Leadership: Making Equity Everyone's Work*, the first publication of the On Shared Equity Leadership series, we described how past challenges have led leaders to increased reflection about how they might more effectively implement and engage stakeholders across campus in an equity agenda (Kezar et al. 2021). When trying to make equity an institution-wide priority, many campuses find they have existing pockets of equity work in areas such as ethnic studies, cultural centers, or student affairs, which are often isolated or marginalized from the rest of the campus's strategic priorities. In addition to this marginalization of existing work, some campuses face the challenge of having specific diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)-focused positions that may have high visibility but low influence or power (Williams 2013). The unintended relegation of equity work to just one office or a few pockets of work across an institution has made leaders think about how they might change their practice to embed equity work more comprehensively throughout the institution. Campuses have begun experimenting with more shared forms of leadership to guide their equity work. The idea is that broadly distributing the responsibilities and accountability inherent in leadership may help the equity work itself become less marginalized and instead institutionalized more broadly. In our first report, we describe the broadly inclusive and collaborative leadership approaches that are necessary to achieve equitable outcomes in higher education, which we have termed *shared equity leadership* (SEL). In the SEL framework, a greater number of individuals engage in leadership across an institution and leverage multiple perspectives and expertise to transform entrenched conditions of campus inequity. The first report draws on the findings from a multiple-case study of leaders at eight institutions that are experimenting with shared approaches to equity leadership; in that report, we define SEL and describe its characteristics, underlying values, and practices (Kezar et al. 2021). In this report, the second in the On Shared Equity Leadership series, we highlight four distinct ways to structure SEL that we observed from our participating institutions. We lay the groundwork for understanding these structures by first describing some of the more common or traditional ways that diversity leadership has been structured in higher education, followed by a brief overview of shared leadership structures and then a detailed analysis of the four SEL models. We conclude with examples that show how institutions can reward and incentivize the development of these models.

Structuring Diversity Leadership

As DEI has become an increasing priority in higher education, institutions have organized in ways that attempt to embed responsibility for this work in the organizational structure in order to better support the success of students, faculty, and staff from diverse backgrounds. Perhaps the most common approach to organizing DEI work has been the creation of chief diversity officer (CDO) positions. Scholars noted the emergence of executive-level diversity leadership in the 1970s alongside the growing representation of racially minoritized students (Peterson et al. 1978), but the trend in higher education to hire CDOs took off in the early 2000s and has since continued (Williams and Wade-Golden 2007). As an emerging organizational structure for DEI, the use of a CDO can vary from institution to institution.

Williams and Wade-Golden (2013) identified three models of how CDOs are positioned within the organizational hierarchy, which they term as archetypes of vertical structure (Williams and Wade-Golden 2013, 118). According to a national survey of diversity officers, about 40 percent of CDOs operate in the Collaborative Officer Model, which is characterized by a "single CDO" operating as a "one-person shop, having limited or no ability to hire, supervise, or evaluate the performance of subordinates" (Williams and Wade-Golden 2013, 167). The Collaborative Officer Model offers the campus a dedicated person to advise on DEI matters and can be flexible in terms of what to focus on (e.g., academic outcomes, campus climate, faculty hiring). The accompanying lack of both financial resources and authority to change policies and practice as well as to hold senior leaders accountable, however, often positions the CDO in this model to be a symbolic actor rather than a concrete change maker.

The Unit-Based Model, which refers to the development of a full office to support the CDO, was observed among 31 percent of campuses. The core team may include lower-ranking diversity officers and administrative and technical staff to provide consultation and programming. While the Unit-Based Model involves a higher financial investment in DEI, the CDO office may still lack the power to implement change through other departments and may encounter conflict with colleagues as they work to advance DEI.

Finally, 28 percent of campuses reported utilizing the Portfolio Divisional Model, which builds upon the CDO-focused Unit-Based Model to include several direct reporting units in a vertically integrated portfolio resembling a divisional structure. For example, there may be a central CDO office that oversees the work of cultural centers, Title IX compliance, faculty hiring, and professional development. The advantages of this model include the capacity of the CDO to advance strategic goals for diversity; fully establish diversity as an organizational function; and provide more human resources for diversity initiatives, projects, and events. Organizational challenges for the Portfolio Divisional Model include conflict over whether or not to shift departments into the CDO portfolio and the risk of further compartmentalizing DEI by centralizing it within the CDO's portfolio, which can absolve other departments and administration from engaging in the work.

Whereas the CDO model has typically organized DEI work in a top-down or vertical fashion, this work has also been organized more horizontally or laterally across institutions through the creation of diversity committees, councils, or commissions. Williams (2013) defines diversity committees as groups of "diversity stakeholders who have formally joined forces to shape and in some instances implement a shared plan for the future relative to diversity in a particular organizational context" (Williams 2013, 409). Diversity committees

can be composed of faculty, staff, students, and administrators, which allows for lateral coordination with several levels of the institution (LePeau, Hurtado, and Williams 2019). Moreover, the different stakeholders involved potentially means that such committees can strategically plan and get DEI initiatives passed through with broad support. In light of their often ad hoc nature, diversity committees are frequently tasked with both developing strategy-related tasks (e.g., goal and priority-setting, outreach, campus needs assessment) and implementation steps (e.g., conduct a climate survey, foster campus and community partnerships) (Leon and Williams 2016). LePeau and colleagues' (2019) study of university presidents' councils for diversity found that these committees were tasked with strategic planning, oversight of policies and procedures, and training and programming. The variety of tasks is also reflected in the membership of diversity committees. Members are selected from across academic and student affairs, range in rank (entry-level to dean to vice provost), and may be appointed or self-nominated (Leon and Williams 2016; LePeau, Hurtado, and Williams 2019).

Although CDOs and diversity committees have been promoted for their potential to foster institutional change, there is minimal empirical evidence that such efforts lead to policy, practice, and culture change in higher education. Indeed, there are few studies on the impact of DEI initiatives in general, much less the role of executive leadership in shepherding significant DEI-related organizational change (Patton et al. 2019). There is some recent evidence from the corporate sector that CDOs can have a positive impact on "firm performance" (defined as financial performance), but it is difficult to know how transferable these findings are to the higher education context given the significant differences in mission and goals between the two settings (Mehta et al. 2021). The few studies on CDO impact in higher education suggest that the presence of a CDO actually has minimal effects on increased faculty diversity (Bradley et al. 2018; Tierney and Sallee 2008). While Williams and Wade-Golden (2013) are hopeful in positioning the CDO as an integrative leader at the center of "an effective, horizontal organizational network," in practice the CDO position can end up being largely symbolic in nature—devoid of the power, resources, and authority to make meaningful change—or further siloing DEI rather than making it everyone's work (Williams and Wade-Golden 2013, 79).

Literature and practice suggest the need to understand how DEI might work in top-down or bottom-up structures and across organizational boundaries to ensure that it is integrated throughout the institution.

Similar to Williams and Wade-Golden's (2013) notion of effective DEI organization implemented as a horizontal network, Kezar and colleagues (2008) proposed the notion of a "web of support" to move a diversity agenda forward. In their study, university presidents committed to advancing DEI were most effective when they worked nonlinearly and collaboratively. Presidents saw gains in their diversity agendas when they empowered faculty, administrators, student affairs staff, students, boards, and external organizations. The work of these actors informed changes that included diversity in hiring, faculty retention, improvements in teaching and learning, student support, and community involvement. The study demonstrated that immediate DEI needs and long-term structural changes can occur simultaneously through a web that integrates and empowers multiple campus actors (Kezar et al. 2008). These groups can be informal or more formally structured into a network, council, or task group. The web can also be visualized as a matrix—an organizational structure that cuts across lines horizontally and vertically. Literature and practice suggest the need to understand how DEI might work in top-down or bottom-up structures and across organizational boundaries to ensure that it is integrated throughout the institution. This type of integration can be supported through the use of a *shared leadership* approach.

Shared Leadership Structures[1]

Shared leadership is a collective and nonhierarchical approach to leadership that involves multiple people influencing one another across all levels of an organization, rather than concentrating power and decision-making authority at the top of the organization in an individual leader. Institutional leaders can share leadership roles and responsibilities in varying ways through different structures or models (Denis, Langley, and Sergi 2012). There are three major models for sharing leadership: *co-leadership*, *team leadership*, and *distributed leadership* (see Table 1). These three models are not mutually exclusive, discrete types, and they sometimes overlap in practice. For instance, a higher education institution may have co-leaders at the dean level in a college, as well as a team leadership approach involving the deans of all the colleges across the institution. Despite such potential overlap, it is still helpful to distinguish and describe these models so that we can understand the different conceptualizations, structures, and practices of shared leadership.

The first and most narrowly conceived model is *co-leadership* or *pooled leadership.* In this model, "small groups of people share leadership in the formal top executive function" (Kezar and Holcombe 2017). Typically, the roles of co-leaders are formally delineated with specialized and distinct responsibilities designed to complement one another (Hodgson, Levinson, and Zaleznik 1965). There is little empirical research that highlights co-leadership approaches, either in higher education or in the broader management literature. Instead, most studies focus on models that involve a greater number of individuals in leadership, namely *team leadership* and *distributed leadership.*

Team leadership is perhaps the most commonly studied in the organization and management literature. In this model, leaders share responsibility and influence within a team (Pearce and Conger 2003). It is often less formal or planned and instead tends to be more emergent or flexible. Different arrangements of leadership are formed according to the needs and challenges at hand as well as the expertise of the individuals involved in a team (Yammarino et al. 2012). However, team leadership can also be formally structured and planned, with roles and processes clearly articulated and defined.

A third model of shared leadership is known as *distributed leadership,* which involves "flexible configurations that arise during particular projects or times of change" (Kezar and Holcombe 2017, 6). While there are some similarities to team leadership, distributed leadership is shared more broadly across multiple layers of an organization or beyond organizational boundaries rather than just within a single team (Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond 2001; Denis, Langley, and Sergi 2012). Research on distributed leadership often highlights relationships, situations, and practices in which leadership is embedded rather than focusing on individual leaders (Huxham and Vangen 2000; Spillane 2005). The focus is on the activities, practices, and processes of leadership—such as influencing, agenda-setting, people development—instead of leaders' traits or characteristics (Gronn 2002, 2009; Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond 2001). When we shift the focus to activities, practices, and processes, we can significantly broaden the idea of who can lead. In this expanded conceptualization of leadership, leadership activities and responsibilities can be formally assigned by positional leaders (e.g., through building formal structures or decision-making processes) or informally and fluidly assigned as issues emerge (Lumby 2003; MacBeath, Oduro, and Waterhouse 2004). Leadership can come from any place within the organizational hierarchy. This form of shared leadership is the most complex of all three forms,

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1   This section is adapted from Holcombe et al. (2021).

involving lateral and horizontal influence both within and across team, unit, and organizational boundaries. It has been widely studied in K–12 education (including Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond 2001), public administration, and other nonprofit or community settings (Denis, Langley, and Sergi 2012). Few concrete, practical examples of distributed leadership exist within higher education, however.

TABLE 1: THREE MODELS OF SHARED LEADERSHIP (ADAPTED FROM KEZAR AND HOLCOMBE 2017)

	Co-leadership	**Team Leadership**	**Distributed Leadership**
Description	Pairs or small groups of people share leadership	Leadership functions shared among team members	Leadership dispersed across multiple organizational levels or even organizational boundaries
Structure	Often built into formal structure of top executive role	Flexible configurations that change based on the problem—though can also be formally planned and structured	Flexible configurations that arise during particular projects or times of change—though can also be formally planned and structured
Roles	Roles of co-leaders are specialized, differentiated, and complementary	Leadership shared vertically and horizontally across team based on relevant expertise	People across different organizational levels or boundaries assume leadership as problems arise

Models for Organizing Shared Equity Leadership

Shared equity leadership (SEL) requires the inclusion of more people in the work of leadership. In addition to the common features of the SEL model that we described in our first report (i.e., personal journey toward critical consciousness, values, and practices; see Figure 1) (Kezar et al. 2021), there are a few other common elements of SEL structures that we want to acknowledge before describing the differences in how it can be organized. First, all of the campuses we studied that were implementing SEL had some sort of strategic plan guiding their DEI actions and their shared work. Implementation practices varied by case—for some, DEI goals were built into the institution's overall strategic plan; in others, a specific institutional DEI plan guided action; and in some cases, even individual divisions or units had their own DEI strategic plans. The common thread across these cases is that campuses practicing SEL had a strategy, goals, and an approach that guided their actions. Second, all the campuses we studied had strong support for and engagement with this

approach at the presidential level. The presidents provided symbolic support by frequently communicating the importance of SEL and the institutions' DEI goals as well as material support through funding new positions, initiatives, or trainings. Presidents also played an important modeling role in showing other leaders how to work collaboratively and prioritize equity in their decision-making.[2] While SEL has many characteristics that are common across institutions, it can also be structured or organized in a number of different ways. In our research, we found four distinct models for structuring SEL. The models of SEL structure that we identified have elements of all three models of shared leadership, but probably fit best under the "distributed" category; they are, by and large, whole-institution approaches to sharing leadership. We imagine there are other approaches to sharing leadership for equity, and future research should continue to document approaches that fit best in different institutional contexts. This report identifies and describes the four models that we identified—Hub and Spoke, Highly Structured, Bridging, and Woven—and compares the similarities and differences of these structures for shared leadership for equity. We also share composite narratives to illustrate how each model can work in action. Two of these models represent evolutions of Williams and Wade-Golden's (2013) archetypes of vertical structure for organizing DEI work, while two represent more novel approaches to structuring DEI work.[3]

## FIGURE 1: SHARED EQUITY LEADERSHIP MODEL

SHARED EQUITY LEADERSHIP

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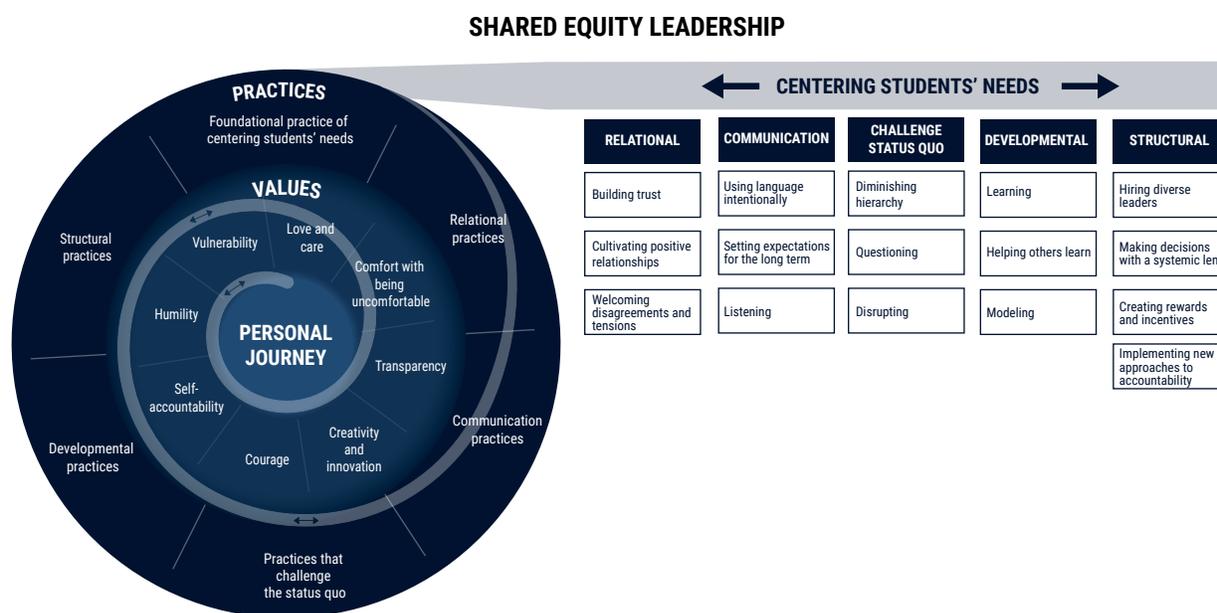
2   We want to emphasize that the models/structures of SEL we describe in this report are *institutional*, and presidential support is key for implementing SEL at a *whole-institution* level. SEL could certainly be implemented on a smaller scale in units or divisions, even if it's not enacted campus-wide.

3   See the appendix for a table that compares the four models across various dimensions.

Hub and Spoke Model
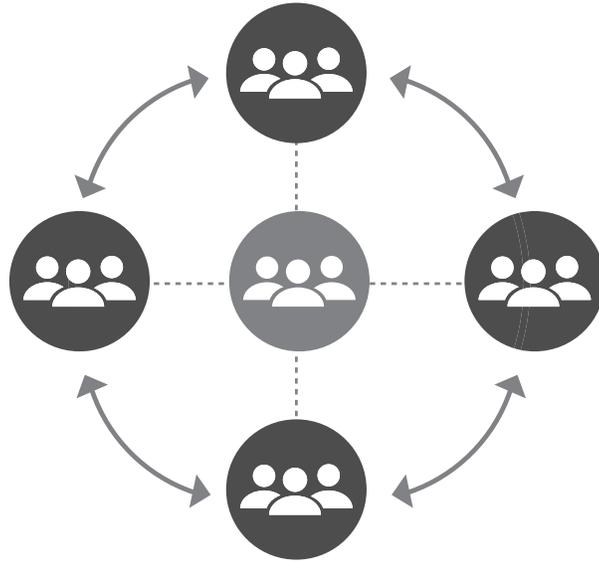
This model represents an evolution of the *unit-based* approach to structuring DEI work identified by Williams and Wade-Golden (2013). In this model, DEI work is led by a CDO or equivalent executive-level position that reports to the president, as well as staff in a DEI office or division. This office serves also as a hub for DEI work, connected to various "spokes" of equity work on campus. The hub acts as a centralized resource for practitioners across campus and can include positions dedicated full time to DEI professional development, project or program management, data and analysis, and more. These positions are formal DEI-specific roles. As one participant noted:

> The Office of Equity is kind of the hub for all the equity work, and it connects like spokes to all the other different groups like admissions, or outreach, or other groups that are interacting directly with students.

The hub also serves a connecting function, identifying opportunities for collaboration among practitioners doing DEI work and facilitating those connections. Some of the spokes that do equity work in this model, in addition to those listed by the interviewee in the preceding quotation, can include opportunity programs or other support programs for first-generation or low-income students, community engagement programs or centers, and online learning or teaching and learning centers. Each of these spoke programs may have a history of equity-linked work, but may have had few opportunities to learn of each other's work, collaborate, or coordinate under traditional hierarchical structures. The hub honors the history of each of these programs—including their experience and knowledge of working with their target student populations—while helping them coordinate, combine resources, and identify potential areas for collaboration. The role of the CDO or executive-level diversity person in this model is a connecting and coordinating one, rather than solely operational. As one president noted of the vision for this role:

> I don't want them to be running equity programs…although they do oversee those programs. But I want them to be very much at an institutional level, and so guiding people to then do those programs…. I honestly also

want people to do it themselves, so they don't just lean on the expert and just go, "Oh our [CDO] is here to talk about equity." No, no, no, no…. We will get to a point of how good we are in the equity work where all of you on your own are able to talk to your team about equity. Not by inviting someone else in.

As the CDO in this model reports directly to the president, they serve an important role both symbolically and practically in terms of access and influence with senior leadership. This connection to the president is critical for helping the CDO and the hub access the resources necessary to create meaningful change, and the CDO serves as a key adviser to the president on strategic DEI-related issues. At the same time, the staff in the hub help maintain a strong connection with mid-level and ground-level leaders across campus, ensuring a strong flow of knowledge and communication about DEI work both toward and away from the hub. In this way, the Hub and Spoke Model has similarities to two of the other models we identified (Highly Structured and Bridging).

The CDO and the team in the hub share leadership and guide the campus's equity agenda and strategic initiatives, while also helping to build the capacity of others on campus to identify ways to be more equitable in their work. One key feature of this model is having a function or individual whose primary responsibility revolves around professional development that centers equity in all its offerings, enabling leadership for equity to develop and grow throughout the institution. Generally, accountability in the Hub and Spoke Model is tied to the DEI goals of the individual units (spokes), but the hub may take on some overarching goals that cross boundaries.

One benefit of the Hub and Spoke Model is that it can play a connecting and amplifying role for campuses that already have a history of doing equity work. This model can unite many existing pockets of solid support programs or initiatives that may be doing good work but in isolation from other departments or divisions. The hub leadership intentionally maps those existing pockets, identifies areas of potential commonality or collaboration, facilitates connections, and adds capacity and resources, rather than creating something entirely new. The hub also helps ensure that those working in disparate areas across the institution get on the same page about

> [The Hub and Spoke] model can unite many existing pockets of solid support programs or initiatives that may be doing good work but in isolation from other departments or divisions.

the campus's definition of equity and how their work fits within that definition. One potential challenge of the Hub and Spoke Model is the risk that the hub could become its own new silo if careful attention is not paid to relationship-building and coordination across the campus spokes. Additionally, accountability in this model could be unclear without intentional assignment and distribution of responsibility, especially for newer initiatives that bridge or connect the different spokes.

Hub and Spoke Model in Action: City University

City University[4] is a regional comprehensive university in a diverse urban area that has had multiple minority-serving institution (MSI) designations for years, as well as a history of engagement with the local community. However, leadership and administration at City have remained primarily White, and BIPOC students have expressed frustrations that they do not always feel welcome or included on campus. A new president started about five years ago and was determined to bring a more concerted, institution-wide focus to equity, inclusion, and racial justice on campus. President Lopez, a Latinx woman, knew that she wanted to implement a shared leadership approach to equity work at City in order to include the perspectives and experiences of stakeholders from a variety of diverse backgrounds. She also wants to build upon the university's history of community engagement as well as the many pockets of DEI work happening across campus, such as learning communities for students from specific racial or ethnic backgrounds and intergroup dialogue training programs. While many faculty and staff have been doing DEI work for years, there is little broad awareness of the work happening in various pockets around campus, and students remain mostly in the dark about the efforts that are happening.

After months of conversation and dialogue with faculty, staff, and students across campus, President Lopez decides that the Hub and Spoke Model seems like the best fit for leading equity work at City. She reallocates funding to create a cabinet-level CDO position and several staff positions and finds space on campus for a new Office of Equity and Inclusion (OEI)—the hub. Several faculty and staff volunteer to work in the new office; ultimately, two staff members (one from the community engagement office and one from institutional research) and a faculty member in sociology who has extensive faculty development experience are selected to round out the office.

The new OEI team leads a campus-wide DEI strategic planning process that includes a comprehensive mapping of all the spokes of DEI work happening at City, as well as identification of all the people who are doing DEI-related work. The DEI leaders identified in this mapping exercise (about 15 in all) form a workgroup to advise the OEI on how best to support their work. OEI staff facilitate workgroup meetings and bring in external speakers and professional development opportunities to help these leaders continue to learn and grow. Meanwhile, the OEI begins to build out a DEI data and analytics support program, working closely with the institutional research office to disaggregate data; implement new racial climate surveys; and run focus groups of students, faculty, and staff of color to learn about their experiences at City. They also partner with the Center for Teaching and Learning and the community engagement office (capitalizing on staff experiences and relationships with all these offices) to create common professional development opportunities for faculty and staff in a variety of DEI-specific areas. While their efforts are still a work in progress, early data suggest that campus stakeholders are much more aware of DEI efforts and that cross-unit collaboration among the spokes is beginning to flourish.

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4   City University and the other examples in this report are composite narratives based on several different institutions we studied.

Highly Structured Model

MID-LEVEL LEADERS

GROUND-LEVEL LEADERS
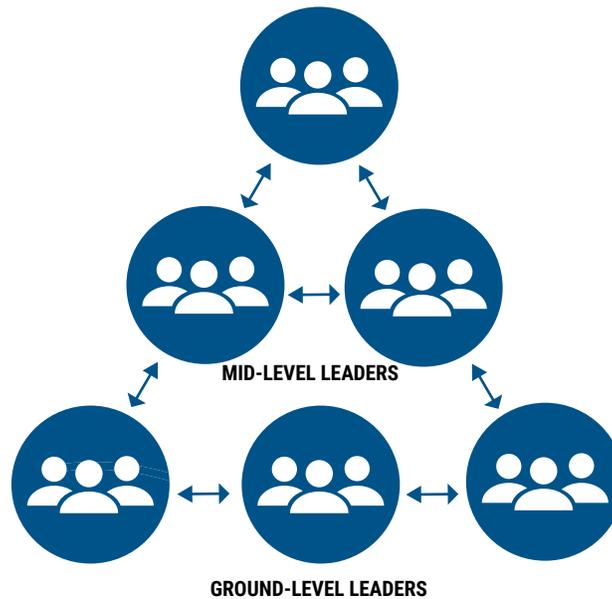
This model is the most formally structured of the four we identified, with a CDO who reports to the president, an extensive staff and multiple reporting units within the DEI division, and many layers of DEI representatives throughout the divisions and units of the university. This model is similar to the Portfolio Divisional Model of vertical structure identified by Williams and Wade-Golden (2013), yet contains even more levels and layers of structure. The dense, complex web of structures emanating from the DEI division helps embed equity work throughout the institution, while also leaving discretion and autonomy to individual offices, departments, or academic units for how they plan to achieve equity goals. The central DEI office is composed of several full-time staff members who guide various aspects of the work. There are also several units or departments that report up into the CDO. As Williams and Wade-Golden (2013) noted, these units could include multicultural or minority affairs, cultural centers, ethnic and gender studies, retention and pipeline initiatives, community outreach, affirmative action and equity, training and development, general student support services such as admissions and registrar, research centers, and international affairs (Williams and Wade-Golden 2013, 176–177). Having multiple units responsible for coordinating equity work under the same organizational umbrella helps coordinate action, minimize redundancy, and streamline processes. A key distinction between our Highly Structured Model and Williams and Wade-Golden's Portfolio Divisional Model is that the Highly Structured Model features a formal horizontal DEI structure, with representatives from each unit or division ("leads") who are responsible for leading DEI work within their sphere of influence. This work is formally coordinated by staff in the DEI office and supported with resources (financial, time, human). As one leader noted:

> The leads are the folks that are on the ground . . . . so each unit has its own culture and its own structure, and being a part of that culture and that structure and part of the leadership team . . . they're not on the outside

Having multiple units responsible for coordinating equity work under the same organizational umbrella helps coordinate action, minimize redundancy, and streamline processes.

> looking in. At the same point in time, [the central DEI office] developed very strong relationships with [the leads] from the very beginning. So we meet . . . [as a group] in person anywhere between once and twice a month . . . . in addition, each lead has a member of [the DEI] office who is a liaison . . . with them, and they meet one-on-one more often.

In addition to one-on-one meetings with DEI office staff, DEI leads meet regularly as a group to discuss challenges and successes and build community around equity work. As one DEI staff member said:

> We also provide important professional development for [leads], both as a group, but also as individual leaders, such that as they move throughout the university in different spaces . . . they're already equity minded leaders and change agents. As they move throughout the university, their impact only continues to be felt.

The Highly Structured Model also often features a department or unit that reports up to the CDO that is responsible for professional development and learning, similar to the Hub and Spoke Model. This unit provides professional development opportunities for the entire institution in a variety of different areas, but the reporting line to the CDO ensures a focus on DEI throughout professional development programming and strategy. Programming could include DEI-specific training sessions; full-fledged leadership or facilitator certification programs; and more informal ongoing programs, such as book groups or affinity groups for faculty and staff of color.

A major benefit of the Highly Structured Model is the clear, formal lines of accountability it establishes within units and centrally. Faculty and staff have a lot of support in learning, developing, and accomplishing their equity goals both horizontally through their unit leads and vertically through the DEI office and division. Like the Hub and Spoke Model, the Highly Structured Model builds capacity centrally while honoring and maintaining local cultures and control. A potential challenge with this model is that the complexity of these structures requires a high degree of organization and potential loss of flexibility in terms of responding to current events or quickly changing course if necessary. Additionally, this model can be resource-intensive to fund, staff, and monitor, and it may work best at an institution that can support and sustain these organizational and resource needs.

Highly Structured Model in Action: Overland University

Overland University is a large research institution in a college town. With a sizeable undergraduate population, as well as several graduate and professional schools and a medical school, Overland is one of the largest institutions in its region. Despite its size and location in a region with a good deal of racial and socioeconomic diversity, Overland has struggled to admit and retain students of color and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as faculty of color.

Upon the recommendation of a group of dedicated faculty and staff, Overland's president has decided to undertake a shared leadership approach to DEI in an attempt to truly transform the campus to be a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable place. Due to the university's sheer size and the many differences in mission and activities among units and schools, the president feels that the Highly Structured Model would be the best fit for Overland. He works with others at the university to establish a central DEI office with a CDO and several staff members. Together with faculty and staff advocates on campus, the new DEI office puts together a DEI strategic plan with some broad central goals around diversifying student, faculty, and staff populations, improving equitable outcomes for different groups, and promoting a more inclusive and supportive racial climate on campus. The plan leaves specific metrics and strategies for how to accomplish them up to stakeholders at the local level, but builds in yearly accountability and reporting structures. It also creates a process for identifying all the different schools and units across the university. The DEI office staff works with leaders of each unit to identify a unit lead for DEI; these leads include newly created DEI-specific positions in the law school, associate deans with existing responsibilities who add DEI to their portfolios, and faculty or staff members. The DEI office arranges a weeklong training for the leads over the summer and has monthly meetings that bring all the leads together to share ideas and challenges and learn together.

The units have each chosen different areas of focus based on their unique contexts and needs. For example, the business affairs unit has focused on diversity in staff hiring and promoting inclusive environments for staff, while the social work school has begun a review of their curriculum and is prioritizing inclusive pedagogy in their courses. Some schools have made significant changes to their promotion and tenure or staff review processes to include DEI as key components of performance evaluations; others have reviewed salary equity and made adjustments where necessary. Still others have focused mainly on providing training for staff members or faculty without much change to existing policies or processes. While these differences in focus can sometimes lead to a feeling of unevenness in the work occurring across units, the monthly meetings of the leads provide a space to share about the ongoing work and promote the more systemic changes that are occurring, and feedback shared up to the central DEI office helps the DEI office staff create opportunities to build capacity in places where work is less transformational. Additionally, giving units the autonomy to define their own priorities within the larger university framework has led to greater buy-in and support across campus. As the approach or strategy is not mandated, different parts of campus can progress at different speeds based on their readiness and capacity and can ultimately engage more authentically—even if it might take a little longer to get there for some.

Bridging Model
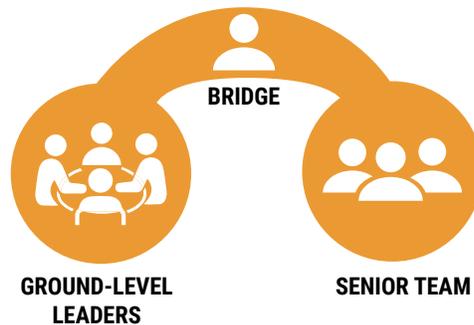
The Bridging Model represents a novel form of structuring equity leadership that is not built around the vertical structure of a CDO, unlike the Hub and Spoke and Highly Structured Models. Intentionally designed as a distributed approach to equity leadership, this model is led jointly by the university's most senior leaders (including the president); a permanent council of faculty, staff, and students responsible solely for helping the institution meet its long-term equity goals; and a person in a "bridge" or translator role who connects the senior leadership and ground-level leaders. This bridge sits on the president's cabinet along with the senior leaders, but also works closely with the faculty and staff who are most involved in the day-to-day work of promoting equity on campus. The bridge has DEI as their primary responsibility; there could be a full-time staff or formal office associated with the position, but that is not always the case. Regardless, the bridge works to connect, navigate, and translate between the cabinet and the council. The Bridging Model has characteristics of Williams and Wade-Golden's (2013) Collaborative Officer and Unit-Based Models, but unlike in these more traditional CDO models the bridge is a capacity builder, coordinator, and connector rather than someone who is responsible for leading the equity charge or carrying out equity programming. Examples of what the bridge might do in these roles include providing or coordinating professional development, identifying similar activities across different units and facilitating connections among the staff or faculty running them, and providing one-on-one coaching support to equity leaders across campus. The Bridging Model also has some similarities to the Hub and Spoke Model. The bridge works to map and connect existing work on campus; however, the Bridging Model is distinct in that there are additionally and intentionally two groups of leaders at the top and the ground level (the cabinet and the council) who are formally tasked with equity responsibilities.

The council of faculty and staff is responsible for maintaining a broad focus on long-term, strategic DEI goals and is a space where issues at the ground level can be raised and shared. The council also makes recommendations to senior leadership around various policies and practices to ensure that a focus on equity remains at the forefront of all institutional decisions. The council is not a traditional governance committee or a crisis response team. It is a permanent working group with a new and unique purpose of bringing ground-level leaders together to embed and sustain equity work throughout the campus, so that it becomes a larger and more permanent part of the institution that can sustain despite leadership turnover or new strategic goals and priorities.

In addition to supporting professional development for various constituency groups across campus, the Bridging Model focuses on group- or team-based learning at both the ground level and the top level of the institution. The council engages in ongoing capacity-building and learning at their meetings. This learning can be facilitated by the co-chairs or members of the council who bring their expertise in various DEI-specific topics, by the bridge, or by external speakers or groups. The bridge also facilitates learning opportunities for the cabinet and regularly and intentionally brings these two groups (council and cabinet) together for ongoing learning and development. Areas of focus for learning and development could include navigating difficult dialogues, learning to communicate across difference, or anti-racist principles, among many other topics.

In terms of accountability, equity goals are built into the positions of cabinet-level leaders, and they are evaluated based on their progress toward those goals. For example, the chief operating officer at one institution using the Bridging Model has specific goals around diversity in hiring for staff positions and training or professional development around DEI issues. As this executive remarked:

> Each one of the president's cabinet members is required to have in their performance objectives…things you're going to do to forward inclusive excellence on this campus, in your particular area. And so that shows up in performance reviews.

This formal assignment of responsibility to executive-level leaders signals the importance of DEI work and ensures that the work is being prioritized across multiple divisions.

Senior leadership involvement establishes strategic focus and prioritization, while the council maintains that focus and incorporates multiple diverse perspectives from across campus. Aside from these two shared leadership structures, the Bridging Model embeds equity work into people's existing roles across campus rather than creating lots of new roles. The Bridging Model does bring in the bridge position as a key DEI leader, but the two shared leadership structures and the embedding of DEI in everyone's work circumvents some of the challenges that come with Williams and Wade-Golden's (2013) Collaborative Officer Model. Instead, challenges that may accompany the Bridging Model include the uncertainties involved with these new, relatively untested roles and structures. Leaders at the executive level may struggle to share control and power with ground-level leaders and may be tempted to position the council as an advisory group with little authority rather than a crucial and knowledgeable partner in equity leadership. Careful definition and norm-setting are required in this model in order to most effectively position these roles and structures to make change.

The Bridging Model embeds equity work into people's existing roles across campus rather than creating lots of new roles.

Bridging Model in Action: College of the Mountains

College of the Mountains (CoM) is a medium-sized liberal arts college in a rural area. While the student body was predominantly White for much of its history, an influx of immigration in the region over the past 20 years has changed the face of the local community and the student body of the college. Now there is no racial majority group on campus. Retention and graduation rates for students of color, however, lag behind those of White students, and a recent campus climate survey showed that students of color (primarily from Latinx, Southeast Asian, and Indigenous backgrounds) do not feel supported or included on campus. The president of the college, herself a daughter of immigrants from Guatemala, has prioritized DEI over the course of her term at CoM, but the climate survey results prompted her to take a new approach and implement a shared equity leadership approach on campus.

Specifically, President Martinez decides that the Bridging Model could work well, as her cabinet members are as passionate and dedicated to equity as she is. Additionally, there is a group of strong equity advocates among the faculty and student affairs staff who seem poised to take on more prominent roles in DEI leadership. To coordinate the work, President Martinez asks her chief of staff, Mark Adams, to serve as special adviser for equity—the "bridge." Adams has held a variety of roles in both student affairs and academic affairs over the course of his 20-year career at CoM, is well respected across campus, and has strong relationships in many departments. In his newly created position, Adams works with the cabinet, the faculty senate, staff council, and student government to establish a Commission on Equity and Inclusion (CEI), composed of 15 faculty, staff, and students from across campus who serve rotating three-year terms. The CEI members are nominated by their peers to serve in these roles and selected for their expertise and skills in DEI-related areas—for example, an education faculty member with facilitation skills in leading trainings on anti-racist and inclusive pedagogies and a staff member with an extensive history of community engagement work. CEI, Adams, President Martinez, and the cabinet work to create a strategic plan for equity and inclusion, establishing key goals around equitable distribution of resources, equity in outcomes, and inclusion and community for all. Equity-specific responsibilities are added to the job descriptions and evaluation criteria for each cabinet member, and CEI serves as a check on monitoring the progress of different initiatives. Adams works individually with each cabinet member, and with the cabinet as a whole, to strategize ways to make change and identify areas for development and capacity-building. As many DEI projects and initiatives cross organizational boundaries and reach into the functional areas of several cabinet members, Adams helps to coordinate the various pieces and ensure that the work stays on track. For example, an effort to create an ethnic studies major involves not only the provost and academic affairs office, but also facilities (to find space for new faculty and courses and an office for the program), student affairs (to train advisers and career counselors on the new major's offerings), enrollment management (so that admissions is aware of the new offering and the registrar's office can schedule new classes), and development and external affairs (to fundraise for the program and create messaging around it). Adams keeps track of all the efforts and helps the president hold each cabinet leader accountable for the changes needed in their area. He also serves as a bridge between the cabinet and CEI to help each group understand the needs and pressures of the other and to strengthen communication and collaboration.

Woven Model

While the Hub and Spoke, Highly Structured, and Bridging Models all create new offices, positions, or groups to structure their SEL approach, the Woven Model instead structures DEI work into people's existing roles and processes. The Woven Model represents a new way of structuring DEI leadership that is not similar to any of Williams and Wade-Golden's (2013) archetypes of vertical structure for organizing DEI work. Rather than having a formalized position such as a CDO or a dedicated office responsible for DEI work, this model embeds DEI into everyone's work, weaving it into the fabric of the institution as part of institutional strategic plans and goals and into individuals' roles. In this model, everyone in a leadership role—unit-level, mid-level, and senior leaders—is expected to pursue campus equity goals as a part of their regular work. Leaders all have DEI-specific responsibilities that may vary based on their position or role. This approach does not mean that the work gets overlooked, marginalized, or ignored. Rather, prioritization of DEI is the normal, accepted way of operating on campus and is enabled by policies and practices that facilitate collaboration and mission-focused work. People are held accountable on a regular basis for accomplishing their DEI goals.

The work is guided by a senior leadership team that is intentionally very diverse in terms of social identities, professional and life experiences, and expertise. This diversity helps leaders bring their personal experiences to the work and keeps the work embedded in everything they do without formal structures to guide it, as this leader noted:

> We have a diverse leadership group. In the process of bringing on these
> leaders, it's been made very clear to them that we . . . expect them not to
> check their identity at the door. That when they come in, we want them to

bring their identity, to bring their sensibilities of ethics, of right and wrong, of how they have felt in environments where they were not the so-called majority, or where their perspective was not valued. And to bring that to what they do every day. So, I think that's one of the things that makes it possible for us to do this . . . we have the opportunity to . . . have this structure, because of the diversity of our leadership. We . . . don't need a position that is dedicated to always reminding everybody else of the diversity goals. Because the diversity goals are in all of our job descriptions and in all of our hearts and the way that we approach what we do.

In addition to DEI being embedded in the institution's roles, plans, and goals, collaborative ways of working are also normative within the Woven Model. Leaders at all levels of the institution are expected to collaborate and work in teams; this collective approach is continuously modeled by senior leaders in the ways that they execute tasks and solve problems. There are also numerous collaborative structures and groups on campus that tackle various aspects of the work. Some of these are permanent, such as groups that work specifically on issues related to research, pedagogy and teaching, community engagement, or emergent DEI challenges. Additionally, some of these collaborative groups are emergent and flexible, forming as problems or projects arise and disbanding when goals are achieved or projects are completed, such as small groups of leaders working to disburse emergency COVID-19 funding or figuring out how to implement a new admissions policy.

> **Leaders at all levels of the institution are expected to collaborate and work in teams; this collective approach is continuously modeled by senior leaders in the ways that they execute tasks and solve problems.**

Because leaders in this model are asked to bring their full selves to work, they help each other learn, grow, and develop every day. There are formal professional development opportunities embedded throughout campus that do have a DEI focus. However, by virtue of the diversity of the leadership group (and the fact that DEI responsibility is structured into every role), development and capacity-building responsibilities are also built into every role and enacted through leaders' relationships with one another. In addition to their different identities and experiences, leaders' varying professional backgrounds in different disciplines and at different institutions also give them unique perspectives to share with colleagues.

In terms of accountability, there are DEI goals in the strategic plan that are assigned to various leaders or groups of leaders across campus. There is also some level of collective accountability since multiple leaders work together on nearly every goal or project. Accountability is generally shared across multiple offices and leaders, as this leader described:

> If things don't go well, then we know it's everyone's fault . . . we all discussed it together so if things go well we can all take shared credit but if things go wrong we can't just blame this person and I think that is quite liberating because people aren't always worried about how will I come out looking after all this is done. So if the focus is institutional it's not personal because I'm not worried about whether I'll be embarrassed if this initiative doesn't work so it becomes an institutional goal.

A key benefit of this approach is that it embeds DEI responsibility into everyone's role rather than into formal, DEI-specific positions. Because everyone is responsible, many areas of campus life that are commonly not thought of with an equity lens are questioned and transformed, such as fundraising and development or facilities. This approach may also be less resource-intensive than a model that calls for the creation of many new DEI-specific positions. However, we want to stress that this model is *not* necessarily resource-neutral or low-cost. Rather, leaders deeply interrogate how funds are currently allocated and spent to uncover patterns of inequity and make efforts to rectify them. The model works to dismantle and change existing structures from the inside-out rather than establishing new structures on top of existing ones. The lack of DEI-specific roles and the crucial importance of collaboration norms in the Woven Model can be a challenge for leaders who are not used to working in this way. Without careful coordination, strong culture-building, and expectation-setting from senior leaders, this model could fall into the trap of nothing getting accomplished since no single person or office bears explicit responsibility for DEI. It is also necessary to have meaningful diversity among leaders in this model in order to maintain the DEI focus and ensure that it is front-and-center in everyone's role.

Woven Model in Action: Palms University[5]

Palms University is a large research university located in a suburban area that exemplifies the Woven Model of shared equity leadership. Leadership operates collectively and collaboratively at all levels of the university, from the cabinet level to the ground level, in a web structure. At the senior level, the president has convened a working group composed of the eight members of the president's cabinet, as well as deans of the university's six colleges, the head of institutional research, and the president of the faculty senate. This group (informally called the Brain Trust) meets weekly and in each meeting discusses progress on equity goals, as well as concerns or challenges to equity that they or their own teams have uncovered. Various members of the Brain Trust have official responsibility (stated in their job descriptions) for different equity goals laid out in the university's strategic plan, and the group works together to monitor progress, hold each other accountable (both through formal evaluation processes and in informal and ongoing conversations), and make progress on the goals that cut across divisions and departments.

The team does not believe that hiring a chief diversity officer or creating an Office of DEI is the right way to execute Palms University's equity goals, as they want everyone to feel like they have an important and meaningful stake in accomplishing the university's equity goals. Further, the diversity of the student body as well as the leadership team means that having only one or a few people responsible for DEI work would feel antithetical to the values of the institution and the individuals within it. This approach to embedding DEI in everyone's roles has been intentionally filtered down to the middle and ground levels of the institution, both through the practices of senior leaders and in policy changes addressing areas such as job descriptions, performance evaluations, and promotion and tenure guidelines to include DEI-specific responsibilities and goals. Because of these changes, equity has truly become everyone's work and is messaged and reinforced at every turn, from job announcements to interview processes, role descriptions to hiring and socialization processes, annual reviews, strategic plans, and more.

In addition to these policy and practice changes that weave DEI responsibility into everyone's role, the president has established the Strategic Equity Working Group, co-chaired by the provost and vice president for student affairs, as a space for anyone on campus to bring up issues related to equity and inclusion, process challenging current events or incidents in community, and come up with creative solutions to emergent equity challenges. This group has a rotating membership of faculty and staff; several subcommittees; and a yearly budget from the president to support research, training, and development. The group serves as a space to hear and consider new and emergent equity challenges that may not fit neatly into existing goals or initiatives in the strategic plan; having such a space gives members of the campus community confidence that their concerns will be heard while also allowing other conversations to stay focused on strategic equity priorities.

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5   This section adapted from Kezar et al. 2021.

Incentivizing and Rewarding Shared Equity Leadership Across the Models

We have identified a variety of ways to incentivize and reward SEL, regardless of the model that campuses used to structure their leadership work. Incentives and rewards seem to be most important when beginning the SEL implementation journey. Incentives help enable the significant institutional changes associated with this approach to equity leadership and encourage leaders across campus to take a risk and participate in this new way of working. In this section, we describe a few of the strategies that campuses used to incentivize participation and reward participation in SEL.

First, some campuses rewarded engagement in equity-specific professional development by advancing faculty or staff on the salary schedule or by providing stipends for completing specific workshops or trainings (or a specific number of hours of training within a specified set of opportunities). These explicit monetary rewards immediately increased participation in such trainings and helped ensure that a broad group of campus leaders received similar learning opportunities. This strategy can obviously get quite costly depending on how it is structured, but several campus leaders described success in engaging individuals in equity work with this strategy. Another useful strategy to promote participation for faculty specifically was to provide seed grants for faculty to undertake equity-linked research or community action projects. These grants could be contingent upon sharing the findings with specific leadership groups on campus or could include invitations to participate in an equity-specific committee, council, or commission. Additionally, some campuses reported changing their promotion and tenure or evaluation policies to include credit for equity leadership work. Other campuses tied funding for units, offices, or programs to their progress on DEI goals, incentivizing groups to work together to meet equity goals in order to maximize their funding.

While all of these strategies helped promote broader participation in equity leadership, ultimately the leaders we spoke with described the most important strategy as setting the expectation or creating the norm that everyone on campus is responsible for equity leadership. Leaders repeatedly described that this work is "just who we are" or "just what we do," and they often struggled to articulate specific rewards or incentives that motivated them to do the work. Especially after the initial start-up phase, expectation-setting became more important than incentivizing or rewarding.

Conclusion

The campuses we studied have operationalized and organized SEL in a variety of different ways. As leaders consider how to select a structure or model that works best for their campus, various aspects of campus context could shape their choice. These considerations include the institution's history, size, culture, sector, political environment, leadership capacity, or stage of DEI work. For example, the Woven Model may not be effective in a predominantly White institution with little history of engagement in DEI work. One of the more structured approaches with clearly defined roles and processes might be better suited to a campus that is less diverse or newer to this work. Conversely, a minority serving institution (MSI) with a mission focused on inclusion or equity, a history of engaging in this work, and a diverse leadership team might be better suited to the Woven Model, as tasking a specific person or group with responsibility for achieving DEI goals may feel counterproductive or like it actually de-prioritizes the work. Leaders might also consider the size, complexity, and decentralization of their campus when deciding how to structure their SEL approach. For example, a large, decentralized campus with several professional schools might need the Highly Structured Model in order to maintain some level of consistency in terms of goals and accomplishments, while also leaving space for units to define their own approaches based on local culture and needs. Conversely, a smaller campus or one with fewer competing purposes (such as a liberal arts college or another undergraduate-only institution) might find a Highly Structured Model approach too rigid or bureaucratic and could benefit from the Hub and Spoke or Bridging Models.

These are just some of the considerations that leaders could take into account when considering how to structure their shared equity leadership efforts. Further, we imagine that the models we have identified are four among myriad possible ways to structure this work. This report does not provide an exhaustive or comprehensive selection of organizational models. Rather, we hope that these descriptions will give leaders concrete ideas and strategies to structure and organize the work of shared equity leadership on their own campuses.

Reflection Questions on Structuring Shared Equity Leadership

1. How is DEI leadership currently structured on your campus? Do you have a CDO or DEI executive leader? Are units or offices tasked with DEI responsibilities? How are other groups across campus engaged in DEI leadership and connected with one another (e.g., councils or committees, commissions)?

2. Do you think leadership for DEI is being shared effectively on your campus right now? Who else might need to be included in and connected to your equity leadership efforts? How might you connect existing pockets of DEI work more effectively or build new connections?

3. Does your current equity leadership structure share any similarities with any of the models described in this report (Hub and Spoke, Highly Structured, Bridging, or Woven)? What similarities did you notice? What differences?

4. Did one model particularly resonate with you or seem like it might be a particularly good fit for your campus? Why?

Appendix: Comparing the Models

	Hub and Spoke Model	Highly Structured Model	Bridging Model	Woven Model
Similarities to Existing DEI Organizational Model or New Structure	Williams and Wade-Golden (2013) Unit-Based Model	Williams and Wade-Golden (2013) Portfolio Divisional Model	New	New
CDO or Senior-Level DEI Position?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Staff or Units with Formal DEI Responsibilities	Yes	Yes	Possibly	No
Involvement of Other Campus Actors (Non-Senior Leaders)	Extended to individual units, supported through the hub	Formal representatives in each unit and department	Representative, through formal council	Fully embedded into roles through socialization and culture
Professional Development (PD)	Formal position (who resides within the hub) responsible for PD	Department responsible for PD that reports up to the CDO	PD occurs among council leaders, bridge facilitates learning opportunities for senior leaders	No formal position or unit responsible for PD but learning happens both formally through equity-focused trainings embedded within units throughout campus and informally through modeling
Accountability	Generally, accountability for DEI goals is tied to individual units responsible, but hub takes on overarching goals that may cross boundaries	Each unit is accountable for the goals in its unit-specific DEI plan; CDO and division leadership are accountable for making sure units are setting appropriate goals and supporting them in meeting those goals	DEI goals explicitly named as responsibility of senior leaders and ground-level leaders (council)	DEI goals in strategic plan are assigned to senior and mid-level leaders. Also some level of collective accountability—since multiple leaders work together on nearly every goal/project, accountability is generally shared across multiple offices/leaders

	Hub and Spoke Model	Highly Structured Model	Bridging Model	Woven Model
Benefits	Honors and strengthens existing pockets of equity work on campus, builds connections among existing programs and people, builds capacity centrally while maintaining some local control	Clear, formal lines of accountability, lots of support both horizontally and vertically; builds capacity centrally while maintaining some local control, like the Hub and Spoke Model	Purposefully distributed structure that includes senior and ground-level leaders in the work of DEI; senior leader involvement establishes strategic focus and prioritization, while council maintains that focus and incorporates multiple diverse perspectives from across campus	Embeds DEI responsibility into everyone's role rather than into formal, DEI-specific positions; because everyone is responsible, many areas of campus life are questioned and transformed, even those that were not previously viewed through an equity lens
Challenges	Hub risks becoming its own silo if careful attention is not paid to coordination across spokes; accountability can be unclear or too heavily on CDO and the hub without intentional assignment and distribution of responsibility	Complexity of structures requires a high degree of organization and potential loss of flexibility; can be resource-intensive to staff and fund	Senior leaders may have difficulty letting go of control and authority and empowering ground-level leaders with the authority to make change; the bridge's role as a connector and facilitator rather than someone responsible for doing all the DEI work may be challenging for campus stakeholders to understand without intentional role definition and communication	Lack of DEI-specific roles and norms of collaboration can be a challenge for leaders who are not used to working in this way; without careful coordination, this model could fall into the mindset trap of "it's everyone's work so it's no one's work"; leadership must be diverse in multiple ways in order to maintain equity focus

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