

LEADING PRACTICES GUIDE

Consortium Management

Consortium Management encompasses the management of the entire organization providing student transportation services. The four key components of Consortium Management are governance, organizational structure, consortium management and financial management.

The consortium management model and the organizational framework contribute significantly to the ability of the Governance Committee, the Operational Committee, and community stakeholders to establish priorities, goals, policies and procedures that support effective and efficient student transportation operations.

The purpose of reviewing Consortium Management is to:

- Understand how member boards of the consortium participate and share student transportation delivery in the Consortium;
- Understand how the governance model delineates the division of duties between the Governance Body and Operational Committee and supports the learning strategies of the Board;
- Assess the processes for the generation and maintenance of policies and related procedures;
- Identify opportunities to support continual improvement in the effectiveness and efficiency of all processes.

Governance refers to the way in which an organization is directed and controlled. Establishing administrative structures and processes which facilitate and monitor effective business management are primary responsibilities of a governance structure. Three key principles for an effective governance structure are: accountability; transparency; and the recognition of stakeholders. In order to respect these three principles, it is important that the governance body be independent of the management of day-to-day operations.

An organizational structure can have the power to provide for effective communication and coordination which will enable operations to run efficiently. The roles and responsibilities within the organization should be well defined. This will lead to operational efficiencies by ensuring tasks are not being duplicated and issues raised can be addressed effectively by managing up the chain of command. Ideally, the organization is divided functionally (by department and/or area) and all core business functions are identified.

A sound financial management process ensures the integrity and accuracy of financial information. This includes the internal controls that exist within the accounting function and ensures that a robust budgeting process is in place which provides for accountability in decision making.

Financial management policies capture roles and responsibilities, authorization levels, and reporting requirements. A planning calendar refers to key dates for compliance, monitoring policies, or specifics to ensure proper segregation of duties. The policies infer that a proper financial internal control system is in place for the Consortium.

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Leading Practices – Consortium Management	
Governance	
	Clear mandate of accountabilities for the Governance Body to provide oversight and strategic direction to the Consortium.
	Frequent meetings for Governance Body to approve policies, long term strategy decisions, and the annual budget of the Consortium.
	On-going communication back to member boards on strategic and operational plan that impacts each Board.
Organizational Structure and Accountability	
	Establishing a single legal entity through incorporation that safeguards third party liability; further enhances the credibility of the Consortium, improving public accountability and assures continuous existence and stability.
	Entity/Consortium agreement has defined clauses to promote equal representation and fairness among member boards e.g. cost sharing methodology and dispute resolution process.
	Organizational charts that clearly and accurately reflect the organization structure of the Operational Committee and provide for clear roles and responsibilities to manage the day to day operation of the Consortium.
Transportation Service Agreements	
	If Consortium is a separate legal entity - execute a formalized transportation service agreement. This agreement is separate from the Consortium agreement. Where the Consortium agreement establishes the consortium, this agreement articulates the service relationship between the Consortia and member boards. The transportation service agreement should include clauses that specify the scope of services to be provided, fees, insurance/liabilities, quality of service, dispute resolution and other terms.
Procurement Policies	
	Well defined rules and conditions for the acquisition of goods and services that support effective internal control within the consortium. The Governance Committee, in reviewing the policies of each member boards, should establish and communicate clear procurement policies to guide all purchasing decisions and processes.
Decision Making Processes	
	The Governance Body and the Consortium establish appropriate structure and processes to facilitate decision making that address student transportation targets and operational performance.
Stakeholder Engagement	
	The Governance body and Operational Committee proactively communicate to member boards including purchasing service boards.
Development and Reporting of Operational Plan	
	The Consortium Manager and management develop operational plans reflective of the Consortium goals/priorities and periodically reports on their outcomes to the Governance body and stakeholders.
Financial Management	
	The Consortium establishes processes and controls to ensure integrity and accuracy of financial information.
	The Consortium establishes processes and controls to ensure business relationships are defined e.g. appropriate contracts in place, signed and monitored.

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Policies and Practices

Policies and Practices encompass the development, use, and enforcement of transportation standards of service. The three key areas of Policies and Practices are general transportation Policies & Practices, special needs and specialized programs; and safety and training programs.

The development of clear policies and enforceable practices are vital components of an effective and efficient transportation operation. Policies establish the parameters that define the level of service that ultimately will be provided by the Consortium. Equally important are well defined and documented procedures, operational practices, protocols, and the actual application by staff that determine how services are delivered. Policy harmonization between the Partner Boards and the equal application of practices help to ensure that service is delivered safely and equitably to the Partner and Service Purchasing Boards.

For a transportation operation to be fully effective, the needs of all students including students with special needs and those attending special programs must be considered. Special education transportation must consider the mobility of the student, behavioural issues, special equipment operation and attachments, medical conditions, administration of medication, and the time and distance tolerance of the student. Specialized transportation, while less complex in the specific requirements for each student, is faced with similar pressures as transportation is often required from remote areas to centralized or distant programs. While both of these programs create service and cost demands on the system, opportunities do exist for the inclusion of these students on regular education routes to utilize the entire fleet to the highest degree possible.

The safe transportation of students is the overriding goal in any school transportation system. With the complexity of a Consortium model serving multiple boards and utilizing a variety of operators developing clear and concise safety policies, practices, and regular training programs serve to promote a culture of safety within the education, and local communities.

The purpose of reviewing Policies and Practices is to:

- Evaluate the established policies and practices and their impact on the effective and efficient operation of the Consortium.
- Evaluate the documentation procedures, operational practices, protocols, and the actual application by staff to determine how services are delivered.
- Assess the harmonization of policies, regulations and operational practices and procedures between the Partners and Service Purchasing Boards.
- Examine the policies and practices that determine the approach to special needs and specialized transportation, and how well practice conforms to established policies.
- Examine the policies, practices and programs that promote a culture of safety within the education, and local communities.
- Identify opportunities to support continual improvement in the effectiveness and efficiency of all processes.

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Leading Practices – Policies and Practices	
Transportation Policies and Practices	
	The development of a full range of policies to serve the needs of students of member boards. This can include general transportation eligibility criteria; allowable walking distances to a stop or school; stop placement criteria; allowable student ride times; courtesy transportation eligibility, responsibilities of Boards, parents, students, and drivers.
	The development of operating practices to enhance the Consortium's ability to implement policy, and how service will be delivered. This can include appeal processes, identification of hazards and related transportation eligibility; the management of school bell times to improve service efficiency; the use of transfers and other specialty transportation to improve service efficiency; student behaviour management; and weather related events and closings.
	Creation of a corresponding Operation Procedures Manual will provide Transportation Technicians with "line by line" instructions as they administer both the daily management of transportation services and for planning. The detail that is provided ensures that transportation is equitably administered across the services area and between the Member Boards.
	Development of an ongoing evaluation process of existing documentation to ensure consistent and equitable service is provided to member boards.
	The uniform enforcement of policies and operating practices throughout the system.
	All policies, regulations, and operational practices and procedures are fully harmonized between the member boards.
Special Needs and Specialized Programs	
	Comprehensive and clearly defined procedures, rules and regulations that give consideration to a wide variety of special circumstances that may need to be accommodated to ensure the safe transportation of students and aid in the comprehensive training of drivers and monitors.
	Indicial and ongoing training programs regarding: student/driver relations; disability awareness; safe use of wheelchair and other assistive devices; care of students with special needs; and evacuation procedures.
Safety Policy	
	Demonstrate commitment to safe transportation of students – support and participate in a variety of safety and training programs.
	Operator's responsibility in safe transportation of students is clearly defined and communicated, e.g. contract clause and driver manual.
	Driver training auditing to ensure compliance and consistency in driver training between operators.
	Sufficient and reliable student information is provided to operators and drivers to enable effective policies with respect to identifying students en route to and from school, ineligible riders, medical support, and accurate information dissemination in the event of a major accident or incident.

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Routing and Technology

Routing and Technology encompasses the management, administration, and use of technology for the purpose of student transportation management. The four key components of routing and technology are software and technology setup and use, digital map and student database management, system reporting and regular and special needs transportation planning and routing.

Modern student transportation routing systems allow transportation managers to make more effective use of the resources at their disposal. These systems allow for improvements in the management and administration of large volumes of student and route data. However, the systems must be fully implemented with well designed coding structures and effective mechanisms to extract and report data to all stakeholder groups.

Adequate reporting allows for the early identification of trends that may be detrimental to operations, improves the analytical capacity of the organization, and allows for internal and external stakeholders to be more adequately informed about operations.

Special education in particular presents unique challenges that often require operational strategies well outside the normal practices of any organization. It is important for consortia to evaluate the strategies, tactics, and processes used to provide transportation to regular and special education students and the approaches used to minimize the cost and operational disruption associated with both types of transportation.

The purpose of reviewing Technology and Routing is to:

- Assess the baseline acquisition, set up, installation, and management of transportation related software;
- Assess whether processes and procedures are in place to update and maintain the student data and map data that forms the foundation of a transportation routing system;
- Assess the type of reports generated, who receives these reports, and what capabilities exist to develop ad hoc reports;
- Assess the strategies, tactics, and processes used to provide transportation to regular and special education students and the approaches used to minimize the cost and operational disruption associated with both types of transportation; and
- Identify opportunities to support continual improvement in the effectiveness and efficiency of all processes.

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Leading Practices – Routing and Technology
Software and Technology Setup and Use
Acquisition, installation and use of one centralized planning and routing system for managing day to day student transportation planning and routing.
Establish effective coding (comprehensive, hierarchical, and well-conceived) based on well defined and implemented transportation policies and practices for efficient identification and management of data records within the routing system.
Establishment of service agreements and maintenance procedures including a disaster recovery plan to ensure the installed technology adequately is supported with uninterrupted access.
Adequate training for system users to ensure capabilities in basic route planning and data analysis and the consistent application of policies and procedures.
Expanded training for system users to enhance understanding in data reporting, analysis of performance and route optimization.
Digital Map and Student Database Management
Use of digital maps, when available, in routing and planning system to improve consistency, accuracy, and efficiency.
Use of digital map which is calibrated, accurate, and minimizes hard coding.
Regular Maintenance of digital map for use in day to day student transportation planning and routing.
Adequate training on map maintenance to system users to ensure consistent use of map and application of policies and procedures.
Use of "rollover" of student data in the transportation database as the first step in the annual route planning cycle. Use of subsequent comprehensive downloads to assist in annual route planning cycle.
Student data in transportation database kept current and accurate by effectively using "add/change/delete" downloads from Board's student management system. Frequency of downloads is appropriate for the Consortium.
System Reporting
Use of system generated reports for communication on routes with bus Operators and Schools.
Adequate reporting that will allow for the identification of trends, system performance, and analytical capacity of internal and external stakeholders for decision making.
Use of system reports for performance assessment e.g. count of daily routes per bus, capacity utilization by route, average ride time, route pairing, average run times, and lateness; fleet age by operator, cost per bus, cost per student, and cost per kilometre.
Use of system reports to guide the scope of annual efficiency reviews conducted within the Transportation Department.
Special Needs Transportation Planning and Routing
Route planning strategies for special needs transportation consider the needs of the students while operating as efficiently as possible.
Route Strategies
The establishment of an integrated run and route network between partner boards.

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Contracts

Contracts refer to the processes and practices by which the Consortium enters into and manages its transportation service contracts. The three key components of Contracting Practices are contract structure, contract negotiations, and contract management.

An effective transportation contract establishes a clear point of reference that defines the roles, requirements, and expectations of each party involved and details the compensation for providing the designated service. Effective contracts also provide penalties for failure to meet established service parameters and may provide incentives for exceeding service requirements. Contract analysis includes a review of the clauses contained in the contract, ensuring that the terms are clearly articulated and a review of the fee structure is conducted to enable comparison of its components to best practice.

Contract negotiations are intended to provide an avenue by which the Consortium, as a purchaser of service, can ultimately obtain the best value for money. The Consortium's goal is to obtain high quality service at efficient market prices.

Ongoing monitoring of compliance and performance of contracted service is an important and valuable practice to enhance service levels and ensure that contractors are providing value for money in the services they render. Monitoring should be performed proactively and on a regular basis in order to be effective.

The purpose of reviewing Contracting Practices is to:

- Understand the contracting practices undertaken by the consortium and assess if such practices will bring the best value for money. The goal of the Consortium is to obtain high quality service at efficient market prices;
- Assess whether the acquisition of transportation service is supported by a procurement process that is fair, accountable and transparent;
- Assess whether the terms of the contracts are clearly stipulated and articulated;
- Assess the administrative, managerial and monitoring processes to ensure transportation service providers are complying with the service requirements with the contracts and agreements during their daily operation; and
- Identify opportunities to support continual improvement in the effectiveness and efficiency of all processes.

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Leading Practices – Contracts	
Procurement Policy	
Each consortia and school board should have procurement policy and guidelines established and approved by their governance committee.	
Procurement and Award of Service	
Acquisition of transportation service using competitive procurement is fair, accountable and transparent. It must be detailed in the consortia procurement policy.	
Acquisition of transportation service not using competitive procurement or single sourcing must be detailed in the consortia procurement policy.	
Award of contract is based on best value for money and required service level expectations, and reflect market prices.	
Contract Completeness	
Defined and enforceable contractual relationship between transportation service providers and the Consortium.	
Contracts with Operators are up to date and signed by both contracted parties prior to the start of the school year.	
Parent agreements for transportation are signed between parents who provide transportation to their own students to and from school.	
Contract Structure	
Clear contract clauses that define the roles, requirements, and expectations of each contracted party involved and detail the compensation for providing the designated service; and detail penalties for failure to meet established service parameters and any incentives for exceeding service requirements.	
Use of a standard contract as a basis to ensure consistency in expectations and delivery of services amongst Operators.	
Monitoring and Reporting	
An effective management process to ensure specific requirements of the contract are actually implemented e.g. valid drivers' licence, proper training certificate, and insurance.	
Periodic route audit are performed to monitor service level compliance and issues are logged and reported for corrective action. Follow up process is in place for compliance for deficiency.	
Safety requirements are monitored and issues are logged reported for corrective action. Follow up process is in place for compliance for deficiency.	