



Key characteristics of

Healthy Organizations

Episode 2: Leadership Models

ABOUT RIVER NETWORK

River Network grows and strengthens a transformational national network of water, justice, and river advocates.

We envision a powerful and inclusive movement that ensures abundant clean water for all people and nature to thrive. We believe that joy and hope for our planet flows through our rivers.

Meet the network and search our Water Protectors Map on our website!
rivernetwork.org ←



IN PARTNERSHIP

This work is produced by River Network with collaborative support from the Hudson River Watershed Alliance.

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Hudson River
Watershed Alliance



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

Hudson River
Estuary Program

LEADERSHIP

Regardless of whether a group is an incorporated nonprofit organization or a collection of committed community members, it's important to have an organized leadership structure. This could be a co-leader model, a team model, or a working group model - or something unique to your group!

- *How many people currently make up your leadership team?*
- *Do you need to in-fill any expertise or skills on your leadership team?*
- *Does your leadership team model advance the work and values of the organization?*
- *Does the leadership team have a shared understanding of how decisions are made?*

For more information on leadership models, [check out this article](#) from the Johnson Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University.



ORG LEADERSHIP

- Board of Directors
 - Board Committees / Working Groups
- Advisory Committee
- Leadership Team
- Executive Team
- Trustees



WHAT DO LEADERS DO?



**Determine vision of
organization**

**Encourage long-term
planning**



**Create & adopt annual
budget**

**Ensures fiscal oversight
and responsibility**



**Ensures governance
policies are followed**

Evaluates performance

CHECKLIST

of Board Roles and Responsibilities

Basic board roles and responsibilities are the foundation for a successful board. BoardSource has designed this checklist so you can quickly remind yourself of your key responsibilities. It's also a great board orientation tool! Can you check all the boxes?

ESTABLISHING IDENTITY AND DIRECTION

- Has the board adopted or revised a strategic plan or defined a strategic direction for the organization within the past three years?
- Does the board ensure that the organization's mission, vision, and values are reflected in the organization's programs?
- Are the organization's strategic priorities adequately reflected in the annual budget?

ENSURING THE NECESSARY RESOURCES

- Has the board adopted policies related to funds to be pursued and/or accepted in support of the mission?
- Does the board expect all its members to be active participants in fundraising efforts?
- Does the board's composition reflect the strategic needs of the organization?
- Is the board confident that the chief executive's skills and other qualities represent a good match for the organization's strategic needs?
- Does the board seek and review information related to the organization's reputation?

PROVIDING OVERSIGHT

- Does the board contract with an outside auditor for the annual audit?
- Does the organization have up-to-date risk management policies and plans?
- Does the board monitor progress toward achievement of goals related to the organization's programs?
- Does the board have a clear understanding of the organization's financial health?
- Does the chief executive receive an annual performance review by the board?
- Are all board members familiar with the chief executive's compensation package?

BOARD OPERATIONS

- Does the board regularly assess its own performance?
- Are organizational and board policies regularly reviewed?
- Do committees and task forces actively engage board members in the work of the board?
- Do board meeting agendas focus the board's attention on issues of strategic importance?
- Do board members have easy access to information needed for effective decision making?

[Source: Nonprofit Board Fundamentals](#)

RESOURCE

BoardSource produces excellent resources for organizations of any size or type.

This checklist lays out the responsibilities of a nonprofit Board of Directors.

The checklist can be used as-is, or applied to different leadership model.

LEADERSHIP MODELS

1. Single-point leadership (traditional)
2. Co-leadership
3. Leadership teams
4. Working groups / Advisory groups
5. “Flat” organizations

SINGLE-POINT

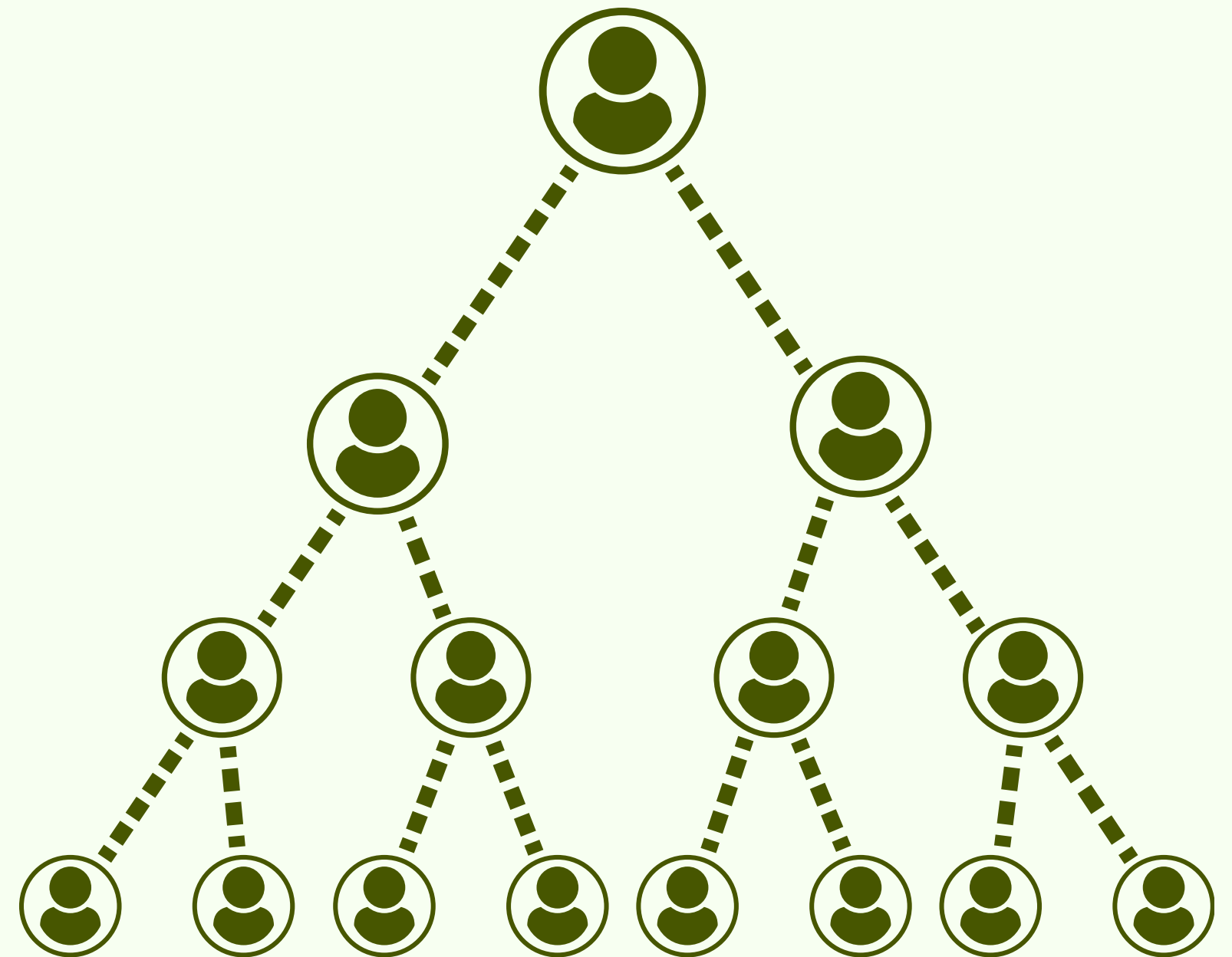
- One person is in charge
- Traditional model of top-down decisions and oversight
- Hierarchical by nature

PRO:

Alleviates confusion about who is in charge, who makes decisions, and where to take feedback/concerns

CON:

Can easily burnout in the leader, result in others feeling disempowered/less involved



CO-LEADERSHIP

- Two people are in charge, influencing decisions together
- Collaborative distribution of leadership duties, based on skills/strengths

PRO:

Leans into strengths-based approach for both leaders, distributes workload reducing burnout

CON:

Differences in opinion/leadership style invites conflict, workload can become significantly uneven without oversight



LEADERSHIP TEAMS

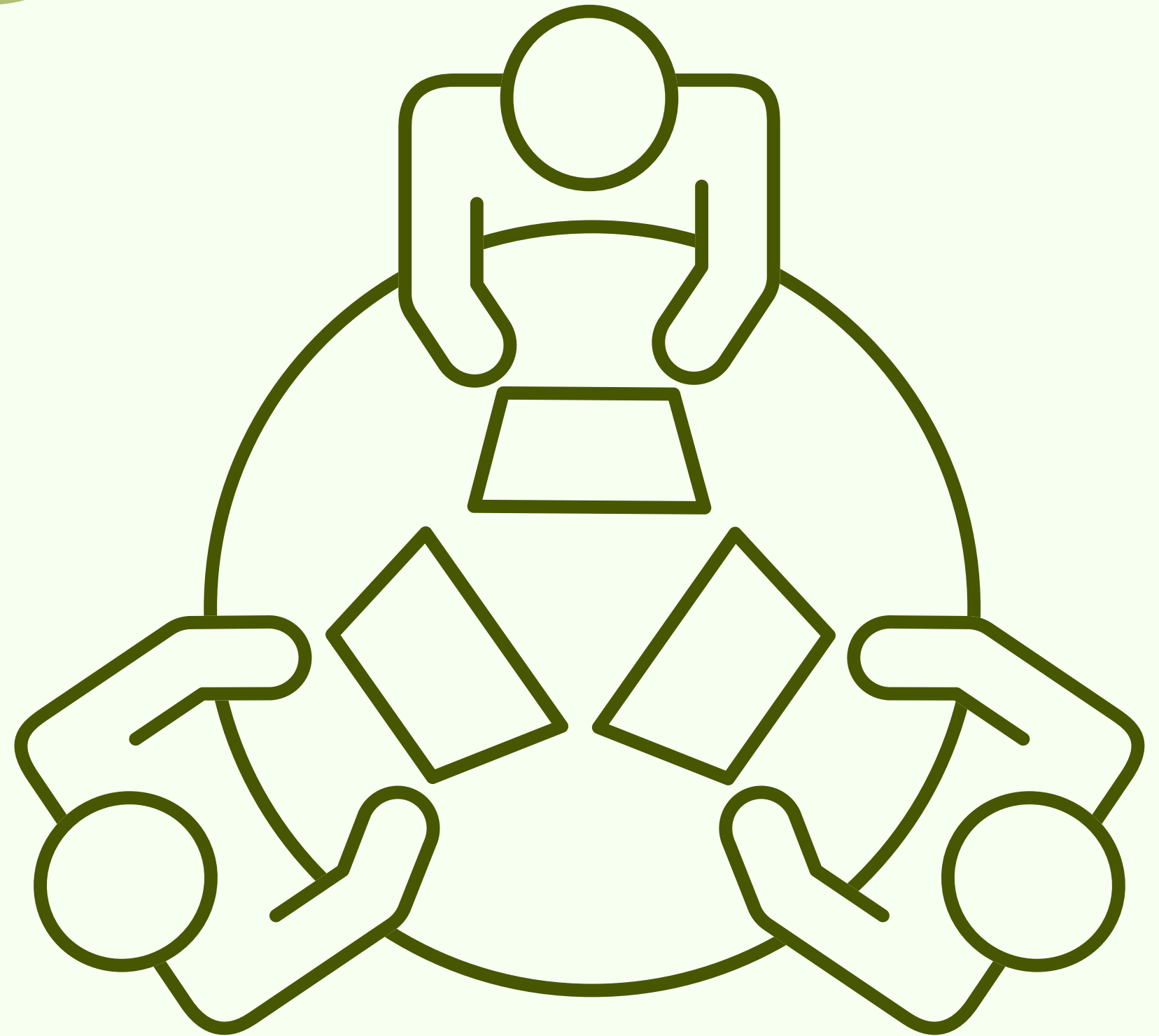
- Three or more people are in charge with defined areas of influence
- Collaborative distribution of leadership duties, based on skills/strengths

PRO:

Leans into strengths-based approach for all leaders, distributes workload reducing burnout

CON:

Creates many points of contact for others involved, can be confusing



WORKING GROUPS

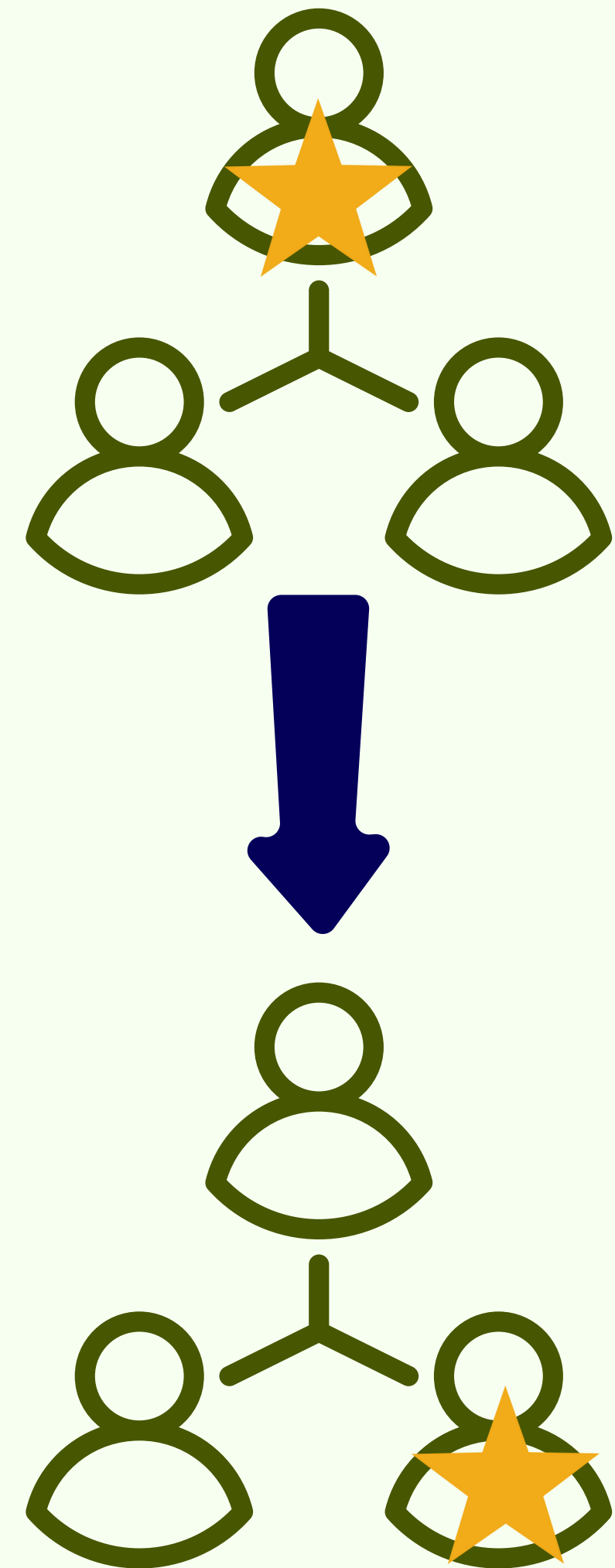
- Small groups focused on specific outcomes/topics
- Often with rotating leadership
- Collaborative distribution of work

PRO:

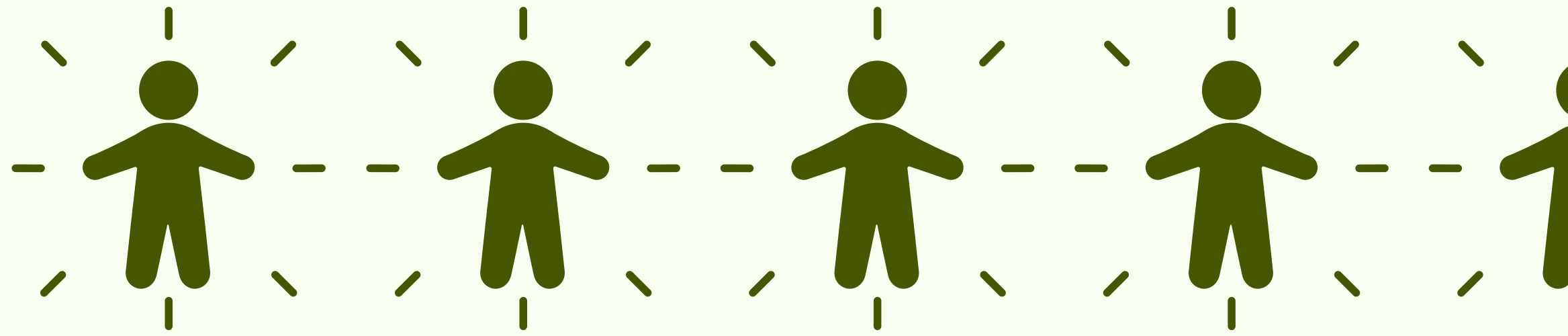
Allows all involved to take on smaller leadership roles or rotate into a large leadership role, as able/interested

CON:

Work can stagnate in these groups if people are unwilling to shift into/out of leadership positions



FLAT ORGS



- Everyone is on the same level - there is no hierarchy whatsoever
- Decision-making and leadership roles are equitably distributed across an entire group
- Usually consensus-based

PRO:

Allows all involved to take on leadership roles, learn new skills, lean into strengths, lead from their own experience

CON:

Decision-making often moves slower, requires a lot of trust and relational infrastructure

KEY QUESTIONS:

- Do you need to in-fill any expertise or skills on your leadership team?
- Does your leadership team model advance the work and values of the organization?
- Does the leadership team have a shared understanding of how decisions are made?
- Is there a shared vision for how leaders interface with others at the organization?



DECISION MAKING: MOCHA

Manager: Supports and holds owner accountable through delegation. Serves as a resource, shares feedback, reviews progress.

Owner: Has overall responsibility for driving the project forward and coordinating steps to accomplish the goal.

Consulted: Provides input and perspective, makes recommendations.

Helper: Implements aspects of the work and actively contributes to project success.

Approver: Signs off on the final product or key decisions (may be owner or manager).

EXAMPLE:

Hannah is developing a workplan for Watershed Group: she will need to organize ideas and resources, work with the board to assign roles, and present the plan for approval. The plan will be written and published online.

EXAMPLE:

Manager: Board President of Watershed Group

Owner: Hannah

Consulted: Board Committee ABC, Community Partners

Helper: Board Vice Chair, Program Director

Approver: Board Vote

DECISION MAKING: DARCI

Decision-Maker: Ultimate & final approval for a project, one person or a small group.

Accountable: One person who is fully accountable for driving the project forward, like a project manager

Responsible: Those carrying out the project, doing the work.

Consulted: Solicited for input, feedback, and guidance on the project.

Informed: Those who need to be kept apprised of decisions and updates.

EXAMPLE:

Hannah is developing a workplan for Watershed Group: she will need to organize ideas and resources, work with the board to assign roles, and present the plan for approval. The plan will be written and published online.

EXAMPLE:

Decision-Maker: Board Vote

Accountable: Board President

Responsible: Hannah, Board Vice Chair, Program Director

Consulted: Board Committee ABC, Community Partners

Informed: Board of Directors, Staff, Key Volunteers

EXAMPLE (RACI):

Responsible: Hannah, Board Vice Chair, Program Director

Accountable: Board President

Consulted: Board Committee ABC, Community Partners

Informed: Board of Directors, Staff, Key Volunteers

RECAP

- What Leaders do: Vision, Resources, Governance
- Leadership Models:
 - Single Point
 - Co-leadership
 - Leadership Teams
 - Working Groups
 - Flat Orgs
- Decision-Making Models:
 - MOCHA
 - DARCI
 - RACI



ORG HEALTH CHECKLIST

For new / early stage / in-transition groups

☐ MISSION STATEMENT

A well-written Mission Statement defines the organization's purpose, guides the work the organization engages in, and clarifies the organization's niche role in the community. A Mission Statement should be succinct: one sentence that clearly states WHY the organization exists.

- What are the main goals of your mission statement (up to three)?
- Does your mission statement state why your organization is unique?
- When was the mission statement last revised/updated?
- Does the mission statement help you decide what projects and programs are right for your organization?

Some organizations also have vision and values statements: a vision statement states WHAT the organization will do, and a values statement suggests HOW the organization will achieve it. Not all of these pieces are necessary, but in combination they can help with making clear decisions about how to invest the organization's capacity.

☐ LEADERSHIP

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☐ DEFINED ROLES

Defining roles for those involved in your group or organization serves a number of purposes: avoiding confusion and duplication of efforts, giving individuals the ability to self-manage confidently, guiding work and directing outcomes, and giving folks a sense of purpose. It's a best practice to define roles in writing with a position or role description, similar to a job description.

- What roles exist in your group/organization?
- Which roles need clarity and a written description?
- Are any roles/positions out-of-date, and need revision?
- Where do you keep/will you keep position descriptions, so members can access them?

☐ FINANCE / BUDGET

Whether your group/organization is grant-funded, relying on individual donations, or accepting business sponsorships, it's important to understand your revenue and expenses. This will allow you to anticipate an accurate budget and understand what resources you need in the future. Even organizations hosting one or two events per year can benefit from a basic budget!

- How are you tracking income and expenses (and who is responsible for this?)
- How are others involved in the organization made aware of spending / income?
- Where can you access your organizational budget?
- Does your budget reflect the goals laid out in your workplan/roadmap?

☐ WORKPLAN (ROADMAP)

A workplan (or roadmap) helps guide the work of the group/organization within a certain timeframe. Some organizations find it helpful to create a 12-month workplan, while others find it more accessible to plan for 3 or 6 months at a time. No matter the timeframe, defining actions in a workplan will help those involved in the organization feel organized, and will advance progress toward the mission.

- Where can you access the organization's workplan?
- Is the workplan up-to-date?
- Are others in the organization referring to the workplan regularly?
- Does the workplan help you identify the best ways to utilize funds?

Follow this link to access a [basic workplan template](#) - for guidance on using the template, check out [this short video](#).

THANK YOU!

Find more
information at
www.rivernetwork.org

***Explore membership, resources, and join
our newsletter & online community!***

