

Systems Planning and Governance

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Canadian
Observatory on
Homelessness



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Systems planning

- Need a conceptual framework to understand and guide efforts towards system planning and integration from a governance perspective
- **System integration:** a more centralized approach to planning, management and service delivery across *networks of organizations* and authorities within and across sectors
- One of the major governance failures of homelessness is that there is a lack of ownership of this issue



Systems planning

- Research on interagency collaboration by Bardach (1998) hypothesized that “substantial public value is being lost to insufficient collaboration in the public sector” (11).
- Peters (2007) likewise contends that “while individual programs must be made to work well, so too must the assembly of programs in government as a whole. At a minimum the programs within a particular area of policy should work together effectively” (74).



Systems planning

Important features of systems integration from a governance perspective include:

1. Boundary identification and expansion;
2. Reconciling competing values in the system(s);
3. Leveraging interdependencies;
4. Leadership and external control;
5. Creating system feedback loops



1. Boundary identification and expansion

- We desperately need a “boundary critique” in our politics and governance around homelessness
- Far too narrowly defined and thus excuses relevant sectors from action
- Barriers: Resistance from other sectors; sectoral expertise; jurisdictional and legal barriers harden boundaries; Government rules (NHI/HPS)



2. Reconciling competing values and knowledge

- Values and beliefs frame the objectives and understandings of the issue and thus ultimately are what subsequent policies, collaborations and interactions stem from
- Not about one rationality dominating, but developing “rich pictures” of a problem definition and system solutions
- Barriers: Often easy to get long list of perspectives, but not coherent distillation of ideas; Difficult to actually shift minds



3. Leveraging interdependencies

- Systems integration efforts must identify the component pieces of the system, thereby defining its boundaries, but also appreciate and conceptualize the interdependencies and relationships among the various elements of the system
- Barriers: These will be very tough conversations and can devolve into circular blaming



4. Leadership and external control

- One of central problems in homelessness governance and policy is a lack of ownership of the issue
- There is value in some sort of backbone organization or central brokering institution to pull this together
- Barriers: Bureaucratic incentives to segment are strong; finding appropriate and stable leadership; must balance authoritative control with deliberative policymaking



5. Creating system feedback loops

- Think of homelessness system in ecological terms; changes in one area will affect other areas (positively and perhaps negatively)
- Systems integration demands the sharing of information and data across sectors
- Barriers: Delayed (positive or negative) reactions throughout the system can be frustrating; strong bureaucratic norms of autonomy



Summary of conceptual framework

Features of Systems Integration	Barriers
Boundary identification and expansion	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Primary vs. secondary mandates2. Lack of cross-sectoral expertise3. Legal and administrative rules
Reconciling competing values	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Shifting mindsets2. Mollifying resistance to new ideas
Leveraging interdependencies	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Mapping the layers of complexity of institutions and policy2. Shifting incentive structures to avoid sectoral ‘dumping’
Leadership and external control	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Securing appropriate, stable, empowered leadership2. Establishing a brokering organization with legitimacy across sectors3. Managing conflict and trust in collaborative governance
System feedback loops	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Information sharing across sectors while respecting privacy2. Balancing ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ feedback loops



Example: Alberta Interagency Council on Homelessness

- Inspired in part by U.S. Interagency Council at the federal and state levels
- 2013: Alberta created the Alberta Interagency Council (IAC) on Homelessness
- The IAC is a “unique partnership” that is “tasked with identifying systemic barriers, developing solutions, and providing strategic recommendations to the Government of Alberta”



Example: Alberta Interagency Council on Homelessness

- The Alberta IAC is comprised of **33 representatives from numerous sectors and organizations**
- including Aboriginal organizations, family and community support services, housing management bodies, local, provincial and federal government ministries...
- ...that are responsible for the delivery of social and income supports for vulnerable Albertans, affordable housing, health and corrections



Example: Alberta Interagency Council on Homelessness

Features to mimic would be:

- (i) genuinely inclusive, cross-provincial membership from community and government,
- (ii) a consensus model of deliberation and decision making, and
- (iii) elected official leadership on the council as a means to remain on the agenda of government.



Example: Alberta Interagency Council on Homelessness

Governance challenges experienced thus far:

1. Work is advisory, not itself authoritative
2. Silos remain and boundaries narrow
3. Need sustained bureaucratic engagement
4. Too narrow of a reporting and accountability structure



Thank you

Look out for the edited volume in January 2016!



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