

GOVERNANCE BY DESIGN:

A PURPOSE-TO-PRACTICE TOOL FOR RIFs & LIPs

A 5-step guide to clarify shared purpose, power and practice in network governance

How to Use This Tool

Work through each section with your RIF/LIP partners to clarify your shared purpose and the guiding principles, people and practices that bring your governance to life.

Step 1: Meaning | What Does Governance Mean to Us?

Prompt: What are we actually governing — and why does it matter?

Think about:

- What does *governance* mean in the context of a partnership network (vs. a single organization)?
- What are we stewarding — resources, relationships, reputation, purpose, outcomes?
- For whom do we hold accountability — funders, partners, newcomers, community?
- What values or assumptions shape how we currently “do” governance?

Output: A short statement capturing your shared understanding of governance (e.g., “For us, governance means stewarding shared purpose and partnership so the network can adapt and deliver impact.”)

Step 2: Purpose | Why Do We Exist and What Are We Here to Steward?

Prompt: What is the shared purpose our governance exists to advance?

Think about:

- What difference are we collectively trying to make in our local systems?
- How does governance help us stay aligned with that purpose during change or pressure?

Output: A one-sentence “purpose of governance” statement (e.g., “Our governance enables shared leadership and coordinated action toward equitable outcomes for newcomers.”)

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Step 3: Principles | What Values and Agreements Will Guide Us?

Prompt: What principles shape our decisions and relationships?

Think about:

- What does *shared leadership* mean here?
- How do we create equity and inclusion in voice and power?
- How do we behave when tensions arise?

Output: 3–5 guiding principles for collaborative, equitable governance (e.g., “*Equity and Inclusion: We intentionally share power and ensure newcomers’ perspectives guide our priorities and actions.*”)

Step 4: People | Who Needs to Be Involved and How?

Prompt: Who’s part of our governance system and what roles do they play?

Think about:

- Whose voices are shaping decisions now — and who’s missing?
- How are newcomers or lived-experience leaders included meaningfully?
- How do partners share power and accountability?



Output: A simple “network map” of the people who participate in your governance — core, contributing, consulted and excluded voices.

Step 5: Practices | How Do We Bring This to Life?

Prompt: What processes and habits help us govern with purpose and agility?

Think about:

- How are decisions made — and how could they be more transparent or participatory?
- How do we learn and adapt together?
- What one or two practices could we test or strengthen?

Output: 1–2 concrete next steps or experiments (e.g., *shared meeting facilitation, newcomer co-chairs*)