

Delivery Unit overview

"Someone needs to manage to the aspiration. Otherwise, the aspiration is something that a board votes on every 12 months and gets neglected. Delivery ensures that someone is watching out for the outcomes we all want. And unless it's someone's job, it's no one's job."

Matt Deninger, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

A Delivery Unit is the dedicated person or team responsible for driving the achievement of a system leader's aspiration and goals for students, no matter what. If a system leader creates and backs a small, flexible, highly capable team that can focus on results, that team will help the leader exercise meaningful influence over the activities of that system to drive towards those results – even as the day-to-day demands of running a system distract the leader's attention.

Delivery Units play 5 roles:

- **Plans and planning:** Delivery Units ensure that a system has priority goals and that each goal has an identified leader and a plan for how it will be achieved. They work with key staff to facilitate or drive this planning.
- **Monitoring and reporting:** When plans are in place, Delivery Units set up the right routines to consistently monitor and report to the system leader on progress against each goal.
- **Evaluation and follow-up:** Between these routines, Delivery Unit members work with goal leaders and their teams to analyze data, arrive at a shared view of progress, tease out the implications for the work and to align resources to keep things on track.
- **Capacity building:** Delivery works best when staff at all levels understand the delivery process, share the system leader's urgency for achieving the goals and have the skills they need (e.g. planning and data literacy). Delivery Units take advantage of every opportunity to "teach" delivery to system staff – including formal training, everyday interactions and job-embedded coaching.
- **Communication and relationship management:** Because their job is to exercise influence without authority, Delivery Units must be experts at managing relationships throughout the system – with goal leaders, with other system staff and with the system leader.

In order to play these roles, we recommend that the Delivery Unit should:

- **Report directly to the system leader.** Some Delivery Units live inside a larger but related central function – such as data, research, evaluation and/or planning.
- **Sit outside the line management hierarchy of the system,** neither managing nor being managed by the goal leaders and teams they work with. This allows them to provide an objective perspective on the system's progress towards its aspirations.
- **Include some of the most talented and capable people in the system** – problem-solvers, relationship managers, data analysts and expert coaches. They are not necessarily the most senior people in a system, but they know how to work with and earn the respect of people at all levels.
- **Over-communicate what the Delivery Unit is and what it is not** – i.e. a "special projects" team, a "policing" function or a general project management unit.

System leaders who build a Delivery Unit have an important role to play early on in guiding their leadership teams to work with the Delivery Unit, publicly communicating about the importance of its work and backing them up when they receive pushback.