Assessing Partner Capacity for Behavior Change Activities

Taking into consideration implementers' limited time and resources, the tools in Pathfinder International's *Straight to the Point* Series provide clear, concise guidance on a variety of issues related to program design, implementation, and evaluation.

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Choosing an Implementing Partner

Projects with a behavior change (BC) component depend, to a large degree, on the ability of local partners to implement them in a manner that is consistent with project goals and objectives. The implementation of BC activities depends on the partner's ability to: 1) deliver the activities to the target population in an effective manner, and 2) monitor both the implementation process and the outputs/outcomes of these activities. Determining whether current or prospective partners can actually carry out the goals of the project is, therefore, of critical importance. A formal partner capacity assessment can take weeks or months. This tool provides a "straight to the point" means of identifying the strengths and weaknesses of BC implementing partners. It offers ideas and suggestions to help supervisors assess partner capacity in a systematic manner. The tool's Capacity Assessment Profile can be used to summarize existing and needed capacity and also as a baseline for monitoring the increased capacity of partners as they work with the project.

Beginning the Assessment

Once organizations have been identified as potential partners, you are ready to begin the assessment. This will involve meeting with the organizations, conducting interviews with key personnel, and learning about their work. The capacity assessment profile in this tool provides a simple way of getting an impression of the organization in several key areas: organizational fit, human capacity, social connectedness, ability to work on behavior-focused activities, and monitoring "know-how." The tool also addresses whether an organization has adequate absorptive capacity (i.e., the ability to take on new projects or incorporate new activities into existing activities). These areas are described below. The final page is a summary sheet that you can use to make your final decision.

ORGANIZATIONAL FIT

Organizations are usually created to help solve a problem or achieve a set of goals. An organization's mission, values, and goals should align, or at least overlap with, those of the project. The project should partner with organizations that have some of the following characteristics:

- Interest in health promotion, HIV and AIDS, or sexual health;
- Commitment to youth, vulnerable populations, or other target groups;
- Intention to bring about social change;
- Belief that harmful social norms can be altered;
- Commitment to communities.

HUMAN CAPACITY

Organizations are run by people with knowledge, skills, and experiences that enable them to carry out tasks. These people constitute an organization's human capacity, which may include paid staff or volunteers. All projects rely on people who have the skills to plan projects, implement them, and monitor their progress. It is not necessary that people have conducted these specific activities before, but rather that they have the ability to do so if given the proper training. Human capacity can include:

- Ability to set goals;
- Ability to plan a set of activities that align with these goals;
- Ability to implement these activities using a range of skills (e.g., community outreach, facilitation, motivation, teaching);
- Ability to develop and implement a simple monitoring system;
- Educational or experiential backgrounds that enable them to learn skills through trainings.

SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Organizations do not operate in isolation; they have relationships with individuals, organizations, and agencies. Social connectedness refers to the intensiveness and extensiveness of these relationships. To evaluate this relationship, consider the following questions:

- Has the organization worked with the target population?

- Is the organization connected to the appropriate regions?

- Does the organization have a good reputation among the people it serves?

- Is the reach of the organization sufficiently extensive?

- Does the organization have good relationships with local decision makers, organizations, and relevant government agencies?

BEHAVIOR CHANGE CAPACITY

Strong projects rely on theories of BC to affect individual attitudes and social norms and ultimately to modify behavior. For activities to be effective, they should reflect these theories of change. You can train partners in applying theory to practice, but potential partners should have some existing experience in bottom-up communication, facilitation, adult education, and prevention strategies. Key questions here include:

- Can the organization effectively develop and communicate messages?

- Does the organization have staff familiar with public health theories of change?

- Does the organization really believe the target population is capable of change (i.e., do they see the target population as full partners in the activities, rather than just an audience)?

- Is the organization genuinely interested in learning and applying behavioral ideas to their practice?

MONITORING CAPACITY

An organization must have the ability to monitor and report basic project progress. Questions here include:

- Has the organization monitored a project before?

- Does the staff understand the basic principles of, and rationales for, monitoring?

- Do they have a system for collecting and entering data?

- Is the organization willing to commit itself to developing and implementing a system for monitoring and reporting progress?

ABSORPTIVE CAPACITY

Absorptive capacity is the ability of an organization to take on new projects and roles. An organization that meets all the other criteria but is too busy to take on new projects or is unable to incorporate new activities into existing activities is not a good fit. You need to know:

- Do existing staff have the time to take on new projects?

- Is the organization able to hire new staff or recruit and train new volunteers?

- Are organizational resources available for the new activities or are some resources restricted to other purposes?

- Does the organization have existing activities that could be enhanced to meet project goals?

Filling out the Capacity Assessment Profile

Interview at least one individual at each administrative level (office of the director, operations management, project supervisor level) and as many contact staff as possible (preferably contact staff working on different projects or with different populations). Get the information for the profile from an administrator. Then confirm this information with as many other administrators as possible. (They should not know that you are confirming information that was already provided—they should provide their own answers.) Differences between their answers may suggest poor intra-organizational communication.

The interview should be informal and conversational. You do not need to fill out the profile as you are conducting the interview, but you should keep it with you, and use it as a guide as you take notes in the space provided for description/justification or in a separate notebook for later reference. *Do not circle the rating as you are conducting the interview.* When you fill out the profile be sure to justify your assessment (i.e., write the reasons for your decisions). After completing your interviews, fill out the Capacity Summary sheet and make your final decision.

Organizational Capacity Assessment Profile

Reviewer: _____ Date(s) visited: _____

Organization name: _____ Contact person: _____

Address: _____

Phone number: _____ Contact email address: _____

People interviewed and their position in the organization:

PERSON INTERVIEWED	POSITION IN ORGANIZATION

Personnel

Total number of paid, full-time staff: _____

Total number of paid, part-time staff: _____

Total number of volunteer staff: _____

Number of staff dedicated only to administration: _____

Number of staff dedicated only to working directly with the population (contact staff): _____

Number of staff dedicated only to monitoring and/or evaluation: _____

Percentage of contact staff with professional degrees/training: _____

Examples of degrees/training attained by non-contact staff: _____

Operations

Source(s) of funding: _____

Years in operation: _____

Geographic areas of operation: _____

Pay scale (How do interviewees compare their salaries to their counterparts in other organizations in terms of "low," "average," "relatively well-paid"? Just indicate what the most common response is.): _____

Turnover (percentage or number of staff members who resign or are let go/fired each year): _____

Organizational Fit

	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
Is the organization committed to working with vulnerable, at-risk populations, or other target populations? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
Is the organization dedicated to promoting the desired public health objective(s)? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
Does the organization believe that social norms can be changed over time? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
Overall, does the mission of the organization align with the mission of the project? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
What training or technical assistance would be needed in this area if the organization were selected as a project partner?			

Human Capacity

Are there people in the organization with experience setting project goals and planning projects to meet those goals? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
Are there people in the organization with experience in educational or behavior change projects? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
Are there people in the organization skilled at outreach, facilitation, motivation, or teaching? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
Are there people in the organization with experience developing and implementing simple monitoring and reporting systems? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
Overall, are there people in the organization with the experience needed to implement project activities? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
What training or technical assistance would be needed in this area if the organization were selected as a project partner?			

Social Connectedness

Does the organization have experience working with the target population? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
Does the organization have experience coordinating small group activities? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
Is the organization affiliated with any sub-communities, such as those based on geography, religion, profession, or political interests? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
Are there any indications or evidence that the organization has a good reputation among the people it serves? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
Is the reach of the organization extensive enough to reach the necessary number of people with project activities? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
Overall, is the organization sufficiently connected to, and respected by, at least one target population so that project activities can be successfully implemented? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
What training or technical assistance would be needed in this area if the organization were selected as a project partner?			

Behavior Change Capacity

Does the organization use peer outreach workers or community-based agents to facilitate discussions? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
Does the organization have staff who are somewhat familiar with behavior change theory (the stages of change, risk perception, etc.)? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
Does the organization seem to "trust" that the target population can be full participants in activities? If not, do they seem willing to do this, or do they prefer to see themselves as "the experts"? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
Overall, do you believe the organization could make their work have a behavioral focus, with the creative use of narratives and the full engagement of the target population? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
What training or technical assistance would be needed in this area if the organization were selected as a project partner?			

Monitoring Capacity

CIRCLE ONE

Does the organization have experience developing and implementing a monitoring system? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO

Does the organization have staff members who understand the basic principles of monitoring or someone who seems capable of learning this? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO

Does the organization have computers or some other way of recording monitoring data? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO

Is the organization willing to develop a simple system for monitoring and reporting progress? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO

Overall, does the organization have the capacity to monitor project activities? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO

What training or technical assistance would be needed in this area if the organization were selected as a project partner?

Absorptive Capacity

Can your specific project activities be integrated into the organization's existing activities? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
Does the organization have sufficient staff who could take on new projects? Does it have the resources to hire new staff or recruit and train new volunteers? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
Are physical resources (computers, space, etc.) being used for other projects or are they available for activities related to your project? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
Overall, does the organization have the absorptive capacity to work as a project partner? **Justify:**	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
What training or technical assistance would be needed in this area if the organization were selected as a project partner?			

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Capacity Summary

Use this table to summarize each of the previous tables. Then determine whether or not the organization has the overall capacity to be a project partner.

KEY CAPACITY AREA	CIRCLE ONE		
Organizational Fit Training needed:	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
Human Capacity Training needed:	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
Social Connectedness Training needed:	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
Behavior Change Capacity Training needed:	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
Monitoring Capacity Training needed:	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
Absorptive Capacity Training needed:	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO
Overall Comments:	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NO