



Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool

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Introduction

AmeriCorps, its State Service Commissions, and intermediaries work with thousands of direct service providers each year to improve the lives of American citizens. This tool was created for AmeriCorps grantees and the broader field to assess organizational capacity to deliver effective services. High-performing organizations typically have a strong understanding of their organization's strengths and challenges. This tool provides a practical method of organizational self-assessment that can be used to acknowledge strengths, clarify different perceptions, and plan strategies to enhance capacity in identified areas. This introduction explains the intended use of this tool and highlights the five domains of organizational capacity assessed by the instrument. For each domain, we offer a brief synopsis of the research literature on effective practice followed by a series of capacity assessment questions. Each domain also includes suggested reading and research to build capacity in that area.

Defining key terms

- **Organizational effectiveness:** The ability of an organization to fulfill its mission through effective leadership and governance, sound management, and the alignment of measurable outcomes with strategies, services, resources, and partners.
- **Organizational capacity:** The wide range of capabilities, knowledge, and resources that organizations need to be effective.
- **Capacity assessment:** The use of a standardized process or formal instrument to assess facets of organizational capacity and identify areas of relative strength and weakness. **Capacity building:** Internal or external strategies that use resources or technical assistance to strengthen an organization's capabilities to enhance organizational effectiveness.

Adapted from Grantmakers for Effective Organizations. (2016). Strengthening nonprofit capacity: Core concepts in capacity building. Washington, DC: Author.

The goal of this tool is to provide AmeriCorps grantees and the broader field with a research-based instrument to promote organizational capacity self-assessment. State commissions and other intermediaries may find this tool particularly helpful in working with subrecipients to identify capacity strengths and areas for support. The tool is designed to be a conversation-starter within an organization and between organizations engaged in a technical assistance relationship.

Key Domains of Organizational Capacity

To develop this tool, AmeriCorps commissioned an extensive review of the research literature on capacity assessment and analyzed leading and widely used assessment tools available in the marketplace. In developing the domains and subdomains, AmeriCorps aimed to take a straightforward, functional approach – using terms common in nonprofit management and organizing the domains based on typical job functions. AmeriCorps also considered domains and subdomains that may be particularly important for AmeriCorps-funded organizations, including volunteer management, community engagement, and evaluative capacity. Figure 1 shows these domains relative to their internal versus external focus. Leadership and evaluative capacity are overarching domains that set the strategy for the organization and drive organizational culture. Management and operations capacity includes more internal functions, while service and community engagement capacity are primarily externally facing. Each of these domains is described in greater detail in the following sections of this tool.

Figure: AmeriCorps Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool Domains



Using This Tool

This tool provides a practical approach to beginning or enhancing an organization's understanding of its capacity strengths and areas where its capacity might be enhanced. Organizational capacity is complex and fluid – it changes over time, and perceptions of capacity often differ within and across organizations. For this reason, AmeriCorps recommends that organizations invite multiple individuals within the organization to complete this assessment and then discuss results – including any differences of opinion. Team members well-positioned to provide insight on organizational capacity include the chief executive officer (CEO)/executive director, members of the board of directors (or comparable entity), leadership team members, and managers. External stakeholders – such as volunteers, partners, or service recipients – can also provide a valuable perspective on all or sections of this assessment tool. Diversity of opinion can indicate misunderstandings that can be easily addressed, or it could reveal areas where there is more work to be done. The tool might also reveal strong areas of capacity to acknowledge and to be sustained.

How to take this assessment:

Prepare

- Identify at least 2-3 individuals within your organization to independently take this assessment. This could include the CEO, members of the board of directors, leadership team members, or even well-informed external stakeholders.
- Set a deadline for respondents to complete the assessment and schedule a meeting to debrief your findings and conclusions.

Assess

- Take the assessment. Check off any statements that are true for your organization from your perspective. Note any questions that are not applicable to your organization.
- Tally the number of checked statements at the end of each domain and the number of skipped questions if any were not applicable.
- Complete the scoring rubric in Appendix A. Identify the domains where your organization has the strongest capacity and domains that could benefit from capacity building.

Reflect

- Discuss your conclusions with the larger respondent team. Dig into any areas of disagreement, seeking to understand and address differences of opinion.
- Share your group's key findings, conclusions, and any action items with the larger staff and board.

Appendix A offers a scoring rubric to help you identify domains and subdomains of capacity that might particularly benefit from capacity-building efforts. To simplify and streamline scoring, all questions are framed negatively – requiring you to simply check off whether a specific capacity is a challenge or a gap for your organization.

This tool has been validated for use with a wide variety of organization types: national and local nonprofits; state, local and tribal governments; institutes of higher education; and funders and intermediary organizations. If a question is not appropriate for your organization, simply skip that question and note its exclusion in your scoring calculation.

The tool was also designed to help organizations assess **changes to capacity over time**. Consider taking and retaking this assessment on an annual or biannual basis to track how organizational capacity strengths and needs change over time.

Capacity building takes time and effort. This capacity tool can be a critical first step toward increasing basic understanding about capacity and prioritizing potential capacity-building efforts. The suggested resources at the end of each domain section provide a helpful starting place to learn more about effective practices for organizational development.

Leadership Capacity

This domain focuses on capacity functions that are typically the responsibility of senior leadership and executive board members (in the case of nonprofits) to guide or execute.

Markers of effective organizational leaderships include:

- **Vision and Mission:** An organization's vision and mission statements articulate its sense of purpose and direction (McKinsey & Company, 2001). Effective vision and mission statements set parameters for what the organization will and will not do; inspire staff, volunteers, and donors; and set the basis for strategy (McKinsey & Company, 2001; Paynter & Berner, 2014; Smith, Howard, & Harrington, 2005).
- **Leadership and Governance:** An organization's governance model is a critical component for organizational functioning and sustainability (Liket & Mass, 2015). For nonprofits with executive boards, clear separation between the board and the organization's leadership is important, as are documented roles and responsibilities (Liket & Mass, 2015). Research suggests that professional diversity, the ability to raise funds, and the size of the board can affect nonprofit effectiveness. Note: Organizations that do not have an executive board or suitable proxy should mark that question as not applicable (N/A).
- **Strategy and Planning:** An organization's vision and mission establish its aspirations, but its strategy articulates the means for achieving those goals (McKinsey & Company, 2001). Research has shown that strategic planning – the process of mission review, stakeholder analysis, and visioning, coupled with the development of resource allocation strategies, boosts organizational capacity (Bryson, Gibbons, & Shaye, 2001; Paynter & Berner, 2014).
- **Culture and Values:** An organization's culture affects every aspect of its functioning – from how leaders interact with the board and staff to how staff members respond to external or internal challenges. Building a strong values-based culture is a strategic and often difficult process that must be led and modeled by organizational leadership. Organizational culture is typically divided into three interrelated components: core values, beliefs, and behavior norms (McKinsey & Company, 2001). Cultural competency, diversity, equity, and inclusion are critical components of a strong organizational culture.

Instructions: Read each statement and check the **True** box to the left if it is true or mostly true for your organization. If the statement does not apply to your organization (e.g., it refers to a governing board practice, and you are a school and do not have a traditional governing board or suitable proxy), check the **N/A** box to the right. If the statement is not true for your organization, check the **Not True** box and proceed to the next statement. Note that selecting all N/A boxes within a domain will produce a form error.

True	Not N/A True
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Vision and Mission

- 1.1 Our vision statement does not describe the future our organization intends to achieve.
- 1.2 Our mission statement does not clearly define what we want to achieve and for whom.
- 1.3 Not all staff fully embrace or could clearly describe our vision and mission to individuals who have never heard of our organization.
- 1.4 Organizational decisions are sometimes not reflective of the mission and vision of the organization and detract from its fulfillment.

Leadership and Governance

- 1.5 Our board does not have an adopted set of bylaws that defines its essential responsibilities and complies with federal and state statutes.
- 1.6 Our board does not adopt and regularly review an annual set of organizational strategic goals and measurable outcomes.
- 1.7 Our board does not adopt an annual budget aligned with its strategic goals and measurable outcomes.
- 1.8 Our board does not regularly update and adopt a set of policies to govern the organization in the areas of finance, human resources, fund development, and communications.
- 1.9 Our board does not evaluate the performance of its CEO on regular basis.
- 1.10 Our board does not evaluate its performance on a regular basis.
- 1.11 Our board does not have the right mix of skills and expertise to govern the organization and routinely consider diverse points of view from internal and external stakeholders.
- 1.12 The composition of our board does not reflect the community we serve.
- 1.13 Board members do not have enough knowledge about our organization and current issues relevant to our organization to make effective policy decisions.

- 1.14 Few or none of the board members are effective at getting others in the community to invest time, money, or other resources in our organization.

Strategy and Planning

- 1.15 Our organization does not have a written strategic plan¹ that includes a clear, specific, and measurable set of goals² and objectives³ to ensure success.
- 1.16 Our organization does not formally share progress on the strategic plan's goals and objectives with board and staff members on a regular basis.
- 1.17 Our organization either did not solicit or did not use external stakeholder input as it developed its strategic plan.
- 1.18 Our board either has not reviewed or has not approved the existing strategic plan in the past 12 months.
- 1.19 Our organization has too many priorities, and our capacity is insufficient or stretched too thin to achieve all of our goals.
- 1.20 Implementation of the action steps in our strategic plan is significantly behind schedule.
- 1.21 Our overall strategy is not broadly known and has limited influence over day-to-day behavior.
- 1.22 There is a lack of clarity on how to make decisions when priorities come into conflict with each other.
- 1.23 Our organization has a history of failing to meet program or organizational goals and benchmarks.

Culture and Values

- 1.24 Our organization does not have a common set of basic beliefs and values that are written, shared broadly, and held by all or the majority of staff.
- 1.25 Our organization does not provide regular opportunities for staff to express constructive feedback or concerns to leadership.
- 1.26 Many staff members are not culturally sensitive with respect to internal management or delivery of services.
- 1.27 Our organization invests little time or resources in reflection or learning.

¹ A strategic plan is a documented framework that communicates an organization's goals, sets priorities, and focuses energy on actions that accomplish those goals (Balanced Scorecard Institute, n.d.).

² Strategic goals are the realistic and clearly defined outcomes that guide implementation of a program or intervention (The NCJA Center for Justice Planning, n.d.).

³ Strategic objectives are concrete explanations of how goals will be accomplished and the necessary steps to reach that end (The NCJA Center for Justice Planning, n.d.).

- 1.28 Our organization does not openly embrace diversity of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and other facets of human identity.
- 1.29 The demographics of our staff do not represent the population it serves.

Domain	Number of Not True Statements	Number N/A
Leadership Capacity		

Resources to build leadership capacity

- [*The strategic plan is dead. Long live strategy*](#), by Dana O'Donovan and Noah Rimland Flower. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. January 10, 2013.
- [*Boards that make a difference: A new design for leadership in nonprofit and public organizations*](#), by John Carver. December 10, 2007.
- [*Trying hard is not good enough: How to produce measurable improvements for customers and communities*](#), by Mark Friedman. March 8, 2015.

Management and Operations Capacity

This domain focuses on internal-facing capacities, including the capacity of an organization to manage its finances; recruit, develop, and retain talent; and maintain critical infrastructure and systems.

Markers of effective management and operations include:

- **Financial Management:** Financial capacity is more than just managing a budget; it is an organization's ability to align its financial capital with its strategic plans and mission (Paynter & Berner, 2014, Misener & Doherty, 2009). Effectively managing resources is critical for mission fulfillment, yet many capacity assessment studies have revealed that direct service providers are frequently troubled by insufficient financial management capacity. An effective organization has the skills and systems necessary, relative to its size and revenue base, for financial planning, accounting, budgeting, and other activities to ensure financial health.
- **Human Resources:** Human resource capacity is the ability to effectively recruit, manage, develop, and retain staff within an organization. Researchers have argued that this ability is the key element that directly affects all other organizational capacities, and it is often seen as a strength in nonprofit and voluntary organizations (Hall et al., 2003; Misener & Doherty, 2009). Staff structures and roles are often used to approximate organizational maturity, with more developed organizations having more specialized and defined staff functions (Schuh & Leviton, 2006). Effective organizations have policies and procedures for staff recruitment, management and supervision, development and training, succession planning and leadership development, compensation, and staff retention.
- **Infrastructure and Information Technology:** Infrastructure refers to the tangible property or goods staff members need to do their jobs. Effective organizations have sufficient infrastructure to facilitate their day-to-day functions. As organizations become more dependent on technology to operate, many struggle to ensure that they have the right systems in place, that they can adequately maintain those systems, and that staff members have adequate training to use information technology (IT) systems such as databases, websites, hardware, and software.

Instructions: Read each statement and check the **True** box to the left if it is true or mostly true for your organization. If the statement does not apply to your organization (e.g., it refers to a governing board practice, and you are a school and do not have a traditional governing board or suitable proxy), check the **N/A** box to the right. If the statement is not true for your organization, check the **Not True** box and proceed to the next statement. Note that selecting all N/A boxes within a domain will produce a form error.

True	Not N/A True
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Financial Management

- 2.1 Our organization does not have an up-to-date fiscal policy and procedures manual.
- 2.2 Our organization does not compare actual with budgeted expenses each month.
- 2.3 Our operations plan and annual budget do not align with our current strategic plan.
- 2.4 Our organization rarely reforecasts year-end revenue and expenses to assist management decision-making.
- 2.5 Our organization does not effectively manage its finances (e.g., it does not have balanced books, appropriate internal controls, on-time accounts payable, or an adequate reserve fund, or it has year-over-year deficits).

Human Resources

- 2.6 Our organization does not have written human resource policies that have been approved by the board and explained to staff.
- 2.7 Staff members are not given constructive feedback from managers or supervisors on a regular basis.
- 2.8 Our organization does not routinely assess workloads to ensure adequate resources are available to meet performance objectives.
- 2.9 Our organization does not have an adequate total compensation system⁴, including salary standards, retirement benefits, health care benefits, and systems for bonuses, awards, or recognition of high performance, that is on par with similar organizations.
- 2.10 Our organization does not fill open positions with highly qualified applicants in a timely manner.

⁴ Total compensation is a holistic model of employee payment that incorporates both monetary compensation (such as base pay, performance-based pay, and bonuses) and nonmonetary compensation (such as health care benefits, trainings, and retirement benefits) (Sharpe, 2016).

Infrastructure and Information Technology

- 2.11 Our organization does not have the right facilities (e.g., space, equipment, or office supplies) to implement our programs and achieve our mission.
- 2.12 Our organization does not have sufficient expertise (on staff or through volunteers or consultants) to effectively and efficiently run and manage our technology systems.
- 2.13 Our staff members do not have the necessary hardware (e.g., computers) and software (e.g., word processing systems and database systems) to do their jobs consistently, efficiently, and effectively.
- 2.14 Important data and files are not backed up at least once a month.

Domain	Number of Not True Statements	Number N/A
Management and Operations Capacity		

Resources to build management and operations capacity

- [*Managing to change the world: The nonprofit manager's guide to getting results*](#), by Alison Green and Jerry Hauser. 2012.
- [*An executive director's guide to financial leadership*](#), by Kate Barr and Jeanne Bell. *The Nonprofit Quarterly*. Fall/Winter 2011.
- [*Financial management for human service administrators*](#), by Lawrence Martin. May 5, 2016.

Community Engagement Capacity

This domain is primarily external facing, focusing on an organization's capacity to draw on strategic relationships with funders, community partners, corporations, media, and individuals to access resources and expertise and to leverage time and in-kind contributions.

Markers of effective community engagement include:

- **Fund Development:** The lack of core, stable, long-term funding is often noted as the greatest challenge to the development of organizational capacity (Hall et al., 2003). Uncertainties about future funding and constraints on how funds can be used can have a significant impact on the ability of an organization to plan strategically – or to execute those plans (Misener & Doherty, 2009). Organizations that are mature in their fund development capacity have provisions for covering overhead costs and routine or formal fundraising activities (such as annual campaigns or events) and have a diverse or strategic array of funding sources (Schuh & Leviton, 2006).
- **Communications and Advocacy:** Increasingly in the digital age, effective and transparent communications are considered essential to nonprofit effectiveness (Liket & Mass, 2015). Communications capacity includes marketing skill, online presence, media relations, and use of social media to raise awareness, advocate, and attract resources to the organization or issue (Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, 2016b). Transparency is often judged by posting the organization's strategic plan and annual and financial reports online and by providing a list of executive board members on the organization's website (Liket & Mass, 2015).
- **Volunteer Management:** Many small community-based nonprofits, as well as larger organizations, rely on volunteers to deliver services or cover other essential staff functions. For some small community-based organizations, the commitment of volunteers can be more important than other capacity areas, such as infrastructure (Paynter & Berner, 2014). Effective volunteer management requires the development and execution of effective recruitment, screening, training, and retention strategies.
- **Community Partnerships:** Partnership capacity includes the skills and mindset to create and sustain relationships with peer organizations, government, corporations, and other key stakeholders to advance the organization's mission (Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, 2016b). Many direct service providers rely on organizations with complementary services to meet the needs of their clients. Volunteer-based organizations often heavily rely on corporations or religious organizations to help recruit volunteers or provide in-kind donations.

Instructions: Read each statement and check the **True** box to the left if it is true or mostly true for your organization. If the statement does not apply to your organization (e.g., it refers to a governing board practice, and you are a school and do not have a traditional governing board or suitable proxy), check the **N/A** box to the right. If the statement is not true for your organization, check the **Not True** box and proceed to the next statement. Note that selecting all N/A boxes within a domain will produce a form error.

True	Not N/A True
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Fund Development

- 3.1 Our organization would shut down or dramatically reduce services if it lost 1-2 key funders.
- 3.2 Our organization has difficulty identifying or cultivating new funders.
- 3.3 Our organization has insufficient discretionary funds independent of project-specific or restricted funds.
- 3.4 Our organization does not have a viable fundraising plan that was developed within the past 12 months.

Communications and Advocacy

- 3.5 Our organization does not have an up-to-date external communications strategy⁵ that addresses crisis communications, marketing, and public relations.
- 3.6 Our organization has outdated communications tools and messages.
- 3.7 Our materials or website do not reflect the quality of our organization.
- 3.8 Our organization has limited or no social media presence.
- 3.9 Our organization leaders are rarely asked by other community or nonprofit leaders to provide leadership, knowledge, or advice on community-level issues.

Volunteer Management

- 3.10 Our organization does not have a written volunteer recruitment and management plan.
- 3.11 Our organization often fails to recruit the volunteers it needs to provide essential services.

⁵ A communications strategy is a document that establishes the objectives, audiences, messages, resources, responsibilities, and measures for an organization's outreach. The objectives in a communication strategy should be segmented by target audience (Hovland, 2005).

- 3.12 Our organization struggles to retain volunteers.
- 3.13 Volunteers often do not know who is managing them.
- 3.14 Volunteers often do not understand their role in the organization.
- 3.15 Volunteers do not always receive the resources, support, and training they need to do their jobs.
- 3.16 Our organization often struggles to recruit the right mix of volunteers (e.g., with the right skills, availability or with backgrounds that reflect the community).

Community Partnerships

- 3.17 Our organization spends insufficient time meeting, interacting, and collaborating with community members, program participants, and leaders for the purpose of learning about what is going on in the community.
- 3.18 Our organization has limited engagement in partnerships because of a lack of awareness or an inability to take advantage of real partnership opportunities.
- 3.19 Our organization has spent so much time on partnership work that it interferes with our ability to implement important goals.
- 3.20 Our organization has focused efforts on partnership work or networking that is not aligned with our mission.
- 3.21 Our organization has not assessed the results of key partnerships, alliances, or participation in networks.

Domain	Number of Not True Statements	Number N/A
Community Engagement Capacity		

Resources to build management and operations capacity

- [*Ten nonprofit funding models*](#), by William Foster, Peter Kim, and Barbara Christiansen. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Spring 2009.
- [*Twenty-first-century communications versus the illusion of control: An epic battle*](#), by Ruth McCambridge. *Nonprofit Quarterly*. August 27, 2014.
- [*Working better together: Building nonprofit collaborative capacity*](#), by Grantmakers for Effective Organizations. 2013.
- [*Management of human service programs*](#), by Judith A. Lewis, Thomas R. Packard, and Michael D. Lewis. August 15, 2011.

Service Capacity

This domain focuses on the capacity of the organization to design research-informed programs, monitor and support quality implementation, and make course corrections as needed.

Markers of service effectiveness include:

- **Program Design:** Programs are more likely to produce reliable, positive outcomes for their clients if they use evidence-based practices and have a clearly articulated logic model or theory of change (Easterling & Metz, 2016). A critical element in strong program design includes taking steps to understand and document relevant community and individual-level needs and assets.

Community needs assessment, asset mapping, and focus groups with potential clients and key stakeholders are all strategies that can assist organizations in designing (or refining) programs that are responsive to client needs and the larger community environment (Sharpe, Greaney, Lee, & Royce, 2000).

- **Program Implementation:** Program implementation is more effective and sustainable if it is documented, monitored, and well-coordinated with other program or organizational functions. Policy and procedure manuals provide evidence of a structured, step-by-step approach to programming and are an essential knowledge and risk management tool (Paynter & Berner, 2014). Coordination across functional teams or other interagency programs can keep programs from operating in isolation and reduce inefficiencies. Finally, monitoring fidelity to policies and practices or to evidence-based programs (if applicable) is essential to ensure that programs provide the intended services (Easterling & Metz, 2016).

- **Performance Management:** Similar to evaluative capacity, performance management capacity focuses on the organization's ability to identify, collect, and monitor key performance indicators (KPIs) directly related to service provision. These KPIs are typically program activities and outputs that provide real-time input on program implementation and client participation (Parmenter, 2015).

Note: if your organization runs multiple programs, be sure to align with your colleagues also taking the assessment on which program(s) you are focusing on as you complete the questions.

Instructions: Read each statement and check the **True** box to the left if it is true or mostly true for your organization. If the statement does not apply to your organization (e.g., it refers to a governing board practice, and you are a school and do not have a traditional governing board or suitable proxy), check the **N/A** box to the right. If the statement is not true for your organization, check the **Not True** box and proceed to the next statement. Note that selecting all N/A boxes within a domain will produce a form error.

True	Not N/A True
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Program Design

- 4.1 Our organization does not have a clear understanding of how our resources and strategies will result in our intended outcomes.
- 4.2 Our program design is not grounded in the best and most recent research literature available.
- 4.3 National service members or volunteers are not explicitly included as a component in our logic model or theory of change.
- 4.4 Our organization has minimal knowledge or understanding of other program models in our field.
- 4.5 Our organization's clients or participants do not provide input or feedback on our program design or implementation.
- 4.6 Our organization does not conduct regular assessments of client needs.
- 4.7 Our new programs are created largely in response to funding availability rather than client needs or community service gaps.

Program Implementation

- 4.8 Policy and procedure⁶ documents are out-of-date or insufficient to provide staff guidance on current program practices.
- 4.9 Insufficient financial or staffing resources are allocated to ensure strong program implementation.
- 4.10 Not all of our program staff has the required knowledge, experience, or skills to implement our program in a manner that will achieve the greatest positive effect.
- 4.11 Staff members with different roles rarely have the time to meet and share their work, coordinate their work, or develop ideas for working together.

⁶ Policy and procedure documents define how an organization operates and provide guidance on program-specific practice (NCVO Knowhow Nonprofit, 2016).

- 4.12 Program leadership does not regularly monitor fidelity to program design⁷ or adaptations⁸ made to implementation.
- 4.13 Staff members do not have a clear understanding of the program logic model⁹ or the relationship between implementation and expected outcomes.

Performance Management

- 4.14 Our program does not have clearly defined key performance indicators.¹⁰
- 4.15 Key performance indicators are not reviewed and discussed by organizational or program leadership at least biannually.
- 4.16 Internal performance data are rarely used to improve the program or organization.
- 4.17 Our organization rarely or never compares our program performance with comparable programs run by other organizations.

Domain	Number of Not True Statements	Number N/A
Service Capacity		

⁷ Fidelity is the “extent to which delivery of an intervention adheres to the protocol or program model originally developed” (Mowbray, Holter, Teague, & Bybee, 2003). Providing consistent services is important for evaluating impact and making adjustments.

⁸ Program adaptations are data-driven changes to implementation to ensure sustainability and effectiveness (Center for Public Health Systems Science, n.d.).

⁹ A logic model is a visual and written depiction of the inputs and activities that will result in the desired outputs and outcomes (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004).

¹⁰ A key performance indicator is a quantifiable performance measurement that indicates the effectiveness of a program or organization in achieving its goals (Jackson, 2015).

Resources to build service capacity

- [*Within our reach: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage*](#), by Lisbeth B. Schorr. March 23, 2011.
- [*Designing and managing programs: An effectiveness-based approach*](#), by Peter Kettner, Robert Moroney, and Lawrence Martin. January 20, 2016.

Evaluative Capacity

This domain focuses on the capacity of an organization to gather data, measure impact, and assess lessons learned to strengthen the organization's work over time.

Markers of evaluative capacity include:

- **Evaluation Planning:** Organizations with strong evaluative capacity develop a systematic plan for evaluation activities with the full engagement and support of senior management (Bourgeois & Cousins, 2013). Execution of the evaluation plan can be the responsibility of internal evaluators and staff or external consultants.
- **Data Collection:** The capacity to collect quality data is often indicated by clear data collection protocols that identify who is collecting what data, when, from whom, and for what purpose (Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, 2016b). Without high-quality data collection, the value of the analysis is questionable.
- **Measuring Impact:** Organizations are best positioned to measure their impact if they use validated or research-based outcome assessment tools that align with their service intervention and their short- and long-term intended outcomes (Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, 2016b). Programs that participate in quasi-experimental or randomized control trials will have a better understanding of the degree that client outcomes can be attributed to organization intervention.
- **Evaluation Use, Learning, and Continuous Improvement:** Organizations that maximize their learning from evaluation activities and use that information to drive continuous improvement tend to share similar characteristics: (1) they openly and widely share evaluation findings with internal and external stakeholders, (2) they link the evaluation process to other organization decision-making processes, and (3) they recognize the value of empirical data in decision-making and problem-solving (Bourgeois & Cousins, 2013).

Instructions: Read each statement and check the **True** box to the left if it is true or mostly true for your organization. If the statement does not apply to your organization (e.g., it refers to a governing board practice, and you are a school and do not have a traditional governing board or suitable proxy), check the **N/A** box to the right. If the statement is not true for your organization, check the **Not True** box and proceed to the next statement. Note that selecting all N/A boxes within a domain will produce a form error.

True

Not
N/A True

Evaluation Planning

- 5.1 Within the past three years, our organization has not developed or not revisited a systematic plan that defines the purpose of our evaluation efforts and our methodology, outlines our evaluation activities, and establishes clear responsibilities.
- 5.2 Our senior leadership does not prioritize evaluation and does not routinely dedicate resources to it.
- 5.3 Our organization has not engaged an internal or external experienced evaluator to design or implement an evaluation plan.
- 5.4 Our organization dedicates insufficient resources for evaluation.

Data Collection

- 5.5 Our organization does not have clear protocols¹¹ for data collection.
- 5.6 Our organization does not provide regular staff training on how to use data collection protocols.
- 5.7 Our organization does not have sufficient or effective data collection systems.¹²

Measuring Outcomes and Impact

- 5.8 Our organization does not internally evaluate the effects of our programs.
- 5.9 The questions in our evaluation instruments¹³ are not clearly stated.

¹¹ Data collection protocol is the systematic procedure through which individuals and organizations collect, maintain, secure, and use data. Protocols ensure that evaluations are effective and valid (Faculty Development, 2005).

¹² Data collection systems, typically using computer-based software, aggregate and analyze sets of data in an efficient manner (Techopedia, n.d.).

¹³ An evaluation instrument is a questionnaire or survey that assesses knowledge gain or behavior change in a group of program participants (Rutgers University, n.d.).

- 5.10 The questions in our evaluation instruments are not in-line with our proposed methods of evaluation and program design.
- 5.11 Our organization has not participated in a high-quality external evaluation, such as a quasi-experimental study¹⁴ or a randomized control trial,¹⁵ to assess the degree that the results can be attributed¹⁶ to the program intervention.

Learning and Continuous Improvement

- 5.12 Staff members across the organization have low levels of knowledge about evaluation and its benefits.
- 5.13 Our organization does not openly and widely share evaluation findings with key stakeholders.¹⁷
- 5.14 Our organization makes limited use of internal evaluation data to make decisions regarding organization strategy or fiscal allocations.
- 5.15 Our organization makes limited use of external research to make decisions regarding organization strategy or fiscal allocations.
- 5.16 Our organization has no systematic evaluation recommendation follow-up process.

Domain	Number of Not True Statements	Number N/A
Evaluative Capacity		

¹⁴ A quasi-experimental study compares outcomes for individuals receiving an intervention with outcomes for comparable individuals not receiving that intervention (Moore, 2008).

¹⁵ A randomized control trial randomly assigns individual participants to either a control or treatment group to measure the impact of an intervention on specific outcomes (Himmelfarb Health Sciences Library, n.d.).

¹⁶ For results to be attributed to program interventions, a causal relationship must exist between them, effectively ruling out other variables as the primary cause (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013).

¹⁷ Key stakeholders are individuals or organizations that share an interest in the program's success. Stakeholders can be funders, partners, community members, participants, board members, or volunteers (The Denver Foundation, n.d.).

Resources to build management and evaluative capacity

- [*The challenge of organizational learning*](#), by Katie Smith Milway and Amy Saxton. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Summer 2011.
- [*Building a strategic learning and evaluation system for your organization*](#), by Hallie Preskill and Katelyn Mack. 2013.
- [*Collective genius*](#), by Linda Hill, Greg Brandeau, Emily Truelove, and Kant Lineback. *Harvard Business Review*. June 2014.
- [*Building evaluation capacity: Activities for teaching and training*](#), by Hallie Preskill and Darlene Russ-Eft. September 15, 2015.

Appendix: Scoring Rubric

Once you have completed the assessment, use this scoring rubric to identify the areas within your organization of greatest strength (domains that return percentages closer to 100%) and need (domains that return percentages closer to 0%) within your organization. This rubric will allow you to reflect on the various aspects of your organization to drive capacity-building efforts. A copy of the domain diagram is included for reference.

The table below displays each of the 5 domains examined through the assessment. If filling out a printed form, see scoring instructions below the table.

Domain	Number of Statements Marked Not True	Total Number of Statements	Number of Statements Marked N/A	Total Applicable Statements	Percentage
Leadership Capacity		29			%
Management and Operations Capacity		14			%
Community Engagement Capacity		21			%
Service Capacity		17			%
Evaluative Capacity		16			%

Scoring Instructions:

1. Tally the number of boxes marked Not True within each domain and record it in the **Number of Statements Marked Not True** column.
2. Tally the number of questions marked N/A and record it in the **Number of Statements Marked N/A** column.
3. Subtract the Number of Statements Marked N/A from the Total Number of Statements column to determine your **Total Applicable Statements** count for each domain.
4. Divide the Number of Statements Marked Not True by the Total Applicable Statements.
5. Convert the answer into a percentage and write that number in the **Percentage** column.

Figure: AmeriCorps Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool Domains



After completing the table, briefly reflect on your results in the space provided. By identifying your strongest domains and the areas of greatest need, you will be better equipped to prioritize capacity building efforts.

Which domain(s) within your organization do you feel are strongest, based on your assessment results?

1. Domain:

2. Domain:

Which domain(s) show the greatest need for capacity building? These gaps can represent possible focal points for strategic planning, technical assistance, or staff training. The Resources to build capacity section at the end of each domain can support your exploration.

1. Domain:

2. Domain:

Be sure to discuss your initial conclusions with colleagues and board members who have also completed the assessment to explore areas of alignment and differences in perspective. The team should be prepared to summarize the group's conclusions and share recommendations on next steps with the larger staff and board. If your organization is working with a technical assistance provider or consultant, share your findings and work together to identify capacity building priorities and next steps.

Using your assessment findings

- Acknowledge and celebrate capacity strengths.
- Explore and resolve differences of opinion on capacity needs across team members or stakeholders.
- Discuss findings with your board, leadership, or management team.
- Gather additional information about your identified gaps in capacity.
- Invite an external resource into a board or staff meeting to discuss specific areas of capacity building.
- Prioritize needs and develop plans to build capacity to address those needs.

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