

Advocacy Core Capacity Assessment Tool (Advocacy CCAT) Report Introduction

Introduction

The accompanying pdf report to this introduction presents your organizational findings for the Advocacy CCAT, which your organization recently completed. The Advocacy CCAT is an addendum tool to TCC Group's Core Capacity Assessment Tool, which presents an assessment of organizational capacity of a nonprofit organization. The Advocacy CCAT builds on the CCAT by incorporating key measures of organizational effectiveness that are either unique or particularly important for policy and advocacy organizations. This report introduction explains more about the report, including a discussion of the context for the various categories.

How to Read Your Report

The first page of the report presents an overview of all of the findings. It starts with the four core capacity scores and is followed by sub-capacity scores for each. The various capacities are described below in this report.

The score for each capacity is reported in two ways. First, a rating, from one to five, representing the mean score for the capacity. This score is based on the five-point strongly disagree to strongly agree scale found in the assessment, where strongly disagree=1 and strongly agree=5. This mean score is then converted into a percentage, which is the second way the score is reported.

Following the overview of findings, a graph of the scores for each sub-capacity is presented. Following the graphs, the final section of the report presents the items where your organization scored below 70 percent from the survey. The purpose of this section is to give your organization a sense of where they could focus in order to improve their capacity in any given area.

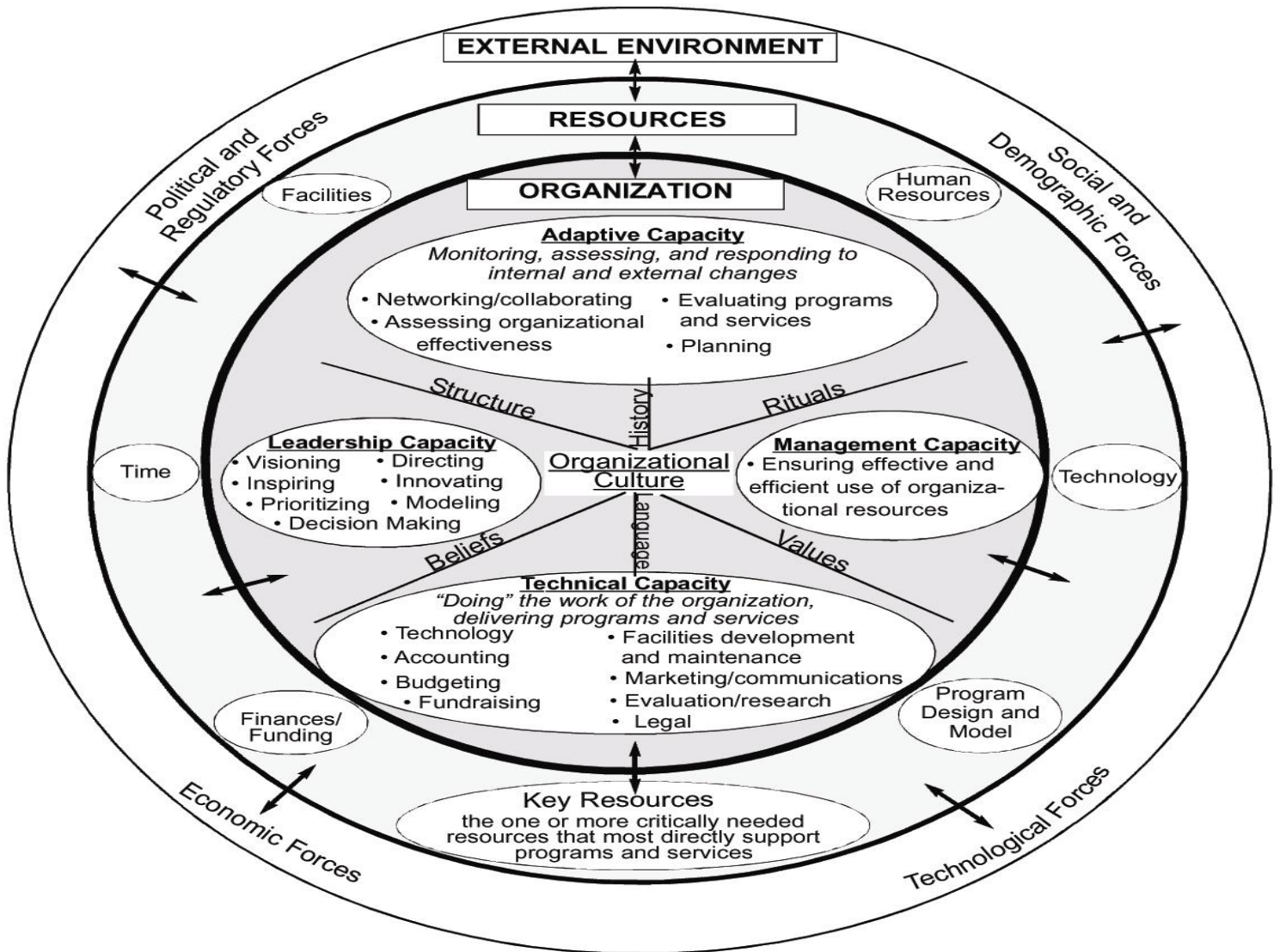
Suggestion for Use of the Report

For maximizing the use of the report, we provide the following suggestions:

- Quickly skim the report in order to be slightly familiar with the layout.
- Read this full report introduction before closely examining your report.
- Look at areas where you scored high with respect to other areas. These are strengths for your organization—consider whether they resonate with your sense of the organization. Then look at areas where you scored less high relative to other areas and see if you agree, and, if you don't, consider why your organization might have scored low in the area such as things going on at the time of the assessment, differences in perception by other organization members, etc.
- Select one or two areas where you scored less well and consider how you might improve in those areas and how such improvement would benefit the organization. You might be aided in this task by the recommendation section.
- Consider how to share the report with others in your organization. Some organizations have found it useful to go through the above suggested process as a group.

Overview of the Core Capacity Model

TCC designed the organizational assessment survey based both on research from the field of organizational effectiveness and on TCC's experience with organizational development and success. The survey assesses an organization based on five organizational capacities: adaptive, management, technical, leadership, and organizational culture (see the diagram below).



Four organizational capacities are critical to overall organizational effectiveness:

- A) Leadership Capacity: the ability of all organizational leaders to create and sustain the vision, inspire, model, prioritize, make decisions, provide direction and innovate, all in an effort to achieve the organizational mission.
- B) Adaptive Capacity: the ability of a nonprofit organization to monitor, assess and respond to internal and external changes.¹
- C) Management Capacity: the ability of a nonprofit organization to ensure the effective and efficient use of organizational resources.
- D) Technical Capacity: the ability of a nonprofit organization to implement all of the key organizational and programmatic functions.

TCC also included organizational culture as a component of the assessment since it has a significant impact on each of the above core capacities. Each organization has a unique history, language, organizational structure, and set of values and beliefs. These cultural elements all serve as the context through which organizations define, assess and improve their effectiveness.

Overview of Policy and Advocacy Organizational Effectiveness

Advocacy organizations come in all shapes and sizes. They have unique program mixes, with some organizations doing only advocacy work, while others conduct advocacy and policy work as an additional activity, building on their primary business of providing direct services to the community. Notwithstanding their differences, there appear to be organizational capacities that span all of these organizations, though the relative mix of the capacities may vary. There are two fundamental premises upon which a framework of organizational capacities for advocacy organizations is based:

1. Advocacy organizations and those doing advocacy programs are nonprofits. As such, general capacities related to the nonprofit sector are applicable.
2. Advocacy organizations, writ large, are engaged in a process leading to outcomes around framing issues, providing visibility for those issues and affecting public policy decisions on those issues. As such, there are capacities unique to advocacy organizations to effectively engage in strategies that affect those outcomes.

For the first assumption, TCC Group has developed an organizational self-assessment based on the four core capacities model. For the second, through research and experience, TCC Group has identified a series of organizational capacities of high-performing policy and advocacy organizations, which are discussed within the context of the four core capacities.

Leadership Capacities

Leadership capacities for advocacy organizations are critical for the success of any initiative. Particularly, it pertains to the capacity to have a clearly defined agenda and motivate towards that agenda. Some of the specific leadership capacities include:

- Leaders have to have a clear vision and be able to articulate that vision.

¹ Christine Letts, William Ryan, and Allen Grossman introduced the concept of adaptive capacity in *High Performance Nonprofit Organizations: Managing Upstream for Greater Impact*. Carl Sussman built on this work in a November 24, 2003 working paper, *Making Change: The Role of Adaptive Capacity in Organizational Effectiveness*, which he developed in partnership with Management Consulting Services with support from the Barr Foundation.

- Leaders need to be strategic about how to accomplish the vision and be willing to utilize a variety of strategies and know when to let others be at the forefront. This leads to leadership authenticity.
- Leaders need to have wide appeal. They need to be strong and credible enough to speak to the powerful and the powerless and to work with a wide variety of people.
- Ability to inspire and keep people engaged over time. This is particularly important for grassroots initiatives, as the window of opportunity may not be clear but is open for only a short period of time.
- Leaders need to seek out other points of view, take advice and be willing to change their mind. While in public, advocates need to be perceived as credible and not wishy-washy, but at the negotiating/strategy table, they need to be able to be flexible.
- Advocacy leaders need to be highly reflective of their own leadership style, practice and performance, particularly at the more grassroots levels.
- Board leadership should understand how the advocacy effort relates to the mission of the organization and needs to be sensitive to monitoring both short-term and long-term objectives, with the understanding that advocacy “outcomes” are not always concrete.

Adaptive Capacity

Adaptive capacity is the second most important capacity (after leadership) for effective advocacy organizations. Advocacy organizations need to be highly adaptable in order to be effective in every-changing environments over the long run. Some of the key adaptive capacities include:

- Regularly review and refine the policy agenda. The organization needs to continuously monitor new opportunities and threats as they arise.
- Reflect on successes and failures. After every initiative it is important for organizations to step back and assess why it worked or didn't work. Further, it is important that a concrete plan is developed to integrate reflective learnings.
- Maintain flexible objectives, but formal metrics. Organizations that don't have solid metrics often lose their direction and the confidence of their constituents. Such metrics are also important for reflecting on successes and failures. Metrics should generally be short term, with a clear idea of how they relate to longer-term goal orientation.
- Adaptability requires funding flexibility. Organizations should have a range of funding sources so that they are not perceived to be unduly influenced by any one funder.
- Take time to reflect and plan for the future—to be stable for a short-time.
- Advocacy organizations need a culture of risk tolerance. Advocacy is rarely an exact science and the course is often winding. However, there is also a need to assess the feasibility of opportunities. Risk tolerance does not mean do everything.
- Strong networking and collaboration. Some of the important elements of network capacity include:
 - Use networks to fill critical gaps and leverage resources. Highly effective advocacy organizations are able to operate in multiple contexts and form strategic partnerships to complement their skill sets.
 - Utilize established networks. Advocacy organizations who try and forge new networks with each new opportunity or threat waste valuable time and

energy. It is important to identify established networks whose interests were compatible, though not necessarily identical.

- Understanding of how an organization's advocacy agenda fits into a broader network of issues, including what the organization's strategic niche/contribution is.
- Networks need to be build with key decision-makers at the table. As a result, for advocacy organizations network capacity and commitment needs to reside in the leadership.

Management Capacity

Management in advocacy organization includes those basic tenets of all organizations: good communication, good people, good resource management, etc. One of the issues that appeared most distinct for advocacy organization, however, is authenticity—where staff are committed, engaged and believe in the work of the organization. Other capacities related to management include:

- Staff need clear and meaningful tasks delegated to them, and then to be given the decision-making “space” to achieve those tasks.
- Knowledge needs to be carefully managed and facilitated between staff and other relevant stakeholders. Organizations need the ability to draw knowledge and input from across the organization.
- Having multiple people with similar job descriptions can be important for managing transitions and being able to scale-up on demand. Generally, the less technical the strategy of an organization the greater value of some job redundancy.
- Manage with a commitment to diversity and shared language (both linguistic and technical).
- It is important to manage external resources, such as relationships with the media, base constituency and policy makers.

Technical Capacities

Technical capacities are the most obvious and straight forward capacities related to advocacy organizations. While technical skills can vary based on the type of advocacy work that an organization is doing (i.e. grassroots organizing or policy-maker influencing), having access to the various technical skills, either in-house or via collaboration, is important. Key technical skills associated with advocacy work include:

- Policy change process knowledge
- Ability to generate knowledge/information
- Media outreach skills
- Policy analysis/research skills
- Stakeholder analysis skills and knowledge pertaining to a particular advocacy strategy (e.g. legal, organizing, policy evaluation, etc.)
- Mechanisms to mobilize a base
- General people skills

Organizational Culture

Culture is important for establishing a shared vision and creating an atmosphere for successfully working together as a unit. There are three cultural elements that appear to be central to advocacy organizations:

- Celebrate success. Advocacy is often hard and ambiguous. As a result, advocacy organizations need to take frequent opportunities to celebrate even minor victories and to give credit to staff and partners, as applicable.
- Have a culture that embraces its constituency.
- Promote a team-working environment, including transparency, respect for multiple viewpoints and creativity.

Indicators of Capacities

The above has briefly outlined some of the capacities that have been identified as important to advocacy organizations/programs. While these are not all the capacities, they represent a critical core. For each of these capacities, there are a set of indicators that help unpack the capacity and provide concrete clues as to an organization's potential effectiveness.

Questions around the measures/indicators of all of the advocacy capacities were compiled randomly into a survey that was completed by multiple respondents (i.e., senior leaders of the organization, including board members) in your organization. The question responses are then aggregated to create scores in each capacity area around specific categories (sometimes called sub-capacities). The sub-capacities for each of the four core capacities specific to advocacy organizations are presented below:

Leadership

- 1 **Advocacy Board Leadership:** How well the organization's board performs its duties, including oversight, understanding of the policy/advocacy agenda and has a clear vision for the organization.
- 2 **Leadership Persuasiveness:** How well organization leaders are able to effectively communicate information and persuade stakeholders on particular issues.
- 3 **Community Credibility:** The extent to which the organization is perceived as credible with the generic "community", constituency or general public.
- 4 **External Credibility:** The extent to which the organization is perceived as a credible resource in pursuit of a policy/advocacy goal and is invited to participate in various initiatives.
- 5 **Leadership Strategic Vision:** How well organizational leaders have and are able to convey a clear mission/vision and make strategic decisions about the organizational approach to policy and advocacy issues.
- 6 **Leadership Distribution:** How well organizational leaders share leadership responsibilities and cultivate broad leadership on the policy/advocacy issue, both internally and externally.
- 7 **Advocacy Decision-Making Strategy:** How well an organization can make strategic decisions about acquiring skills for short and long term.

Adaptive

- 1 **Strategic Partnerships:** How well the organization engages in collaborations or partnerships with other organizations in a way that is both efficient and augments the effectiveness of the organization's strategies.
- 2 **Measuring Policy/Advocacy Progress:** How well the organization formally evaluates progress and uses measurement for decision-making.
- 3 **Strategic Positioning:** How well the organization understands its strategic niche and is able to assess its ability to be successful on any given issue within that niche.
- 4 **Funding Flexibility:** How well an organization is able to shift resources in order to capitalize on changes in the policy/advocacy environment.

Management

- 1 **Policy and Advocacy Staff Roles and Management:** How well the organization is able to effectively manage staff members' skills and resources.
- 2 **Policy and Advocacy Management Systems:** How well the organization has in place plans and systems for effectively managing policy and advocacy activities.
- 3 **Staff Coordination:** How well the organization is able to coordinate staff efforts among the various activities going on within the organization at any given time and over a period of time.
- 4 **Policy and Advocacy Resource Management:** How well the organization manages resources, including knowledge and information.

Technical

- 1 **Database:** Having an effective system for managing relationships with stakeholders.
- 2 **General Staffing Level:** Having sufficient staff overall in relationship to the policy and advocacy strategies of the organization.
- 3 **Policy Issue and Theory Knowledge:** Understanding of the general policy field by staff in the organization.
- 4 **Media Skills:** The ability to work effectively with the media, including cultivating relationships and using the media to disseminate information.
- 5 **Policy and Advocacy Program Skills:** All of the various specific skills needed for engaging in policy and advocacy work, such as knowledge generation, information dissemination, stakeholder analysis, mobilizing constituencies, etc.

Culture

- 1 Willingness to take risks and advocate even when success is not guaranteed.
- 2 Overt acknowledgement of value of partners organizations.
- 3 Overt acknowledgement of value of individual staff members.
- 4 Celebration of success, both small and large scale.
- 5 Staff commitment to the issue.