

**MOVING THE DIAL ON YOUTH WELLBEING**

*A YouthREX Research to Practice Report*

# **Growing the Grassroots:** Strategies for Building the Organizational Capacity of Youth-led Organizations and Initiatives

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## ABSTRACT

The long-term viability of youth-led organizations and initiatives necessitates investment in organizational capacity building work. By building organizational capacity, grassroots youth-led organizations and initiatives will improve their chances of sustainability by increasing their ability to respond to external and internal needs and demands; connecting grassroots youth-led organizations and initiatives with organizational capacity building opportunities is essential for strengthening the sector.

The purpose of this report is to review, examine and assess current organizational capacity building frameworks, present relevant case studies, and offer practical suggestions for building the organizational capacity of grassroots youth-led organizations and initiatives. Due to a lack of literature specific to building the capacity of grassroots youth organizations and initiatives, this report expanded the scope to focus on a general non-profit context. The report presents definitions of organizational capacity building, models for assessing organizational capacity, and identifies strategies for building organizational capacity. The report concludes by synthesizing the findings and offering recommendations for building the organizational capacity of youth-led organizations and initiatives.

## KEYWORDS

Organizational capacity-building, capacity assessment, strategic investment, organizational learning, capacity-building models, organizational impact, organizational sustainability, grassroots youth-led organizations

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## INTRODUCTION

### **The Role of Grassroots Youth-led Organizations and Initiatives in Ontario**

Grassroots youth-led organizations and initiatives provide essential, relevant services and opportunities for Ontario youth, particularly those facing multiple and overlapping barriers to success and wellbeing. From educational and employment supports to programs that encourage civic engagement, social justice, and mental health, grassroots youth-led organizations and initiatives provide community-focused and community-based solutions to community-level challenges.<sup>1</sup> They do so in order to fill opportunity gaps not addressed by the broader public social service and private sectors.

In Ontario, the prominence of grassroots youth-led organizations and initiatives is increasing, indicated by the availability of funding specifically designed to support these groups.<sup>2</sup> Proponents argue that grassroots youth-led organizations and initiatives are often more successful than mainstream service providers at addressing and meeting the needs of youth because they “communicate more easily with other youth, understand their culture, create more appealing programs, and identify with youth issues more effectively.”<sup>3</sup> However, in many cases, these organizations and initiatives are very small volunteer-driven groups with varying degrees of organizational capacity and limited financial resources.<sup>4</sup>

Increasingly both public and private social service funding is tied to an organization’s ability to identify and demonstrate program outcomes.<sup>5</sup> Emerging norms that require organizational transparency and accountability compel funders to request evidence of program impact.<sup>6</sup> For example, the provincial government – arguably the largest funder of the

Ontario youth-led sector – asserts in its recently released Youth Action Plan that it will “increase support for evidence-based, impactful initiatives that provide opportunities to youth and that strengthen community capacity”.<sup>7</sup> However, while a recent surge in the accessibility of funding has provided youth-led organizations and initiatives with opportunities to provide innovative and responsive youth programming, these funds are often pilot-project based and short-term.<sup>8</sup>

In order for youth-led organizations and initiatives to: a) provide excellent services, and b) demonstrate impact, they will require more than short-term project-based funding. The long-term viability of youth-led organizations and initiatives necessitates investment in organizational capacity building work. By building organizational capacity, grassroots youth-led organizations and initiatives will improve their chances of sustainability by increasing their ability to respond to both their current funding context (external) and also to the needs of their organization (internal); connecting grassroots youth-led organizations and initiatives with organizational capacity building opportunities is therefore essential for strengthening the sector.<sup>9</sup>

The purpose of this report is to review, examine and assess current organizational capacity building frameworks, present relevant case studies, and offer practical suggestions for building the organizational capacity of grassroots youth-led organizations and initiatives in order to enhance their sustainability and impact.

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<sup>1</sup> Eckard and Moulton 2010

<sup>2</sup> Illkiw 2010

<sup>3</sup> Illkiw 2010: 37, Warner 2005

<sup>4</sup> Kapucu 2012

<sup>5</sup> Unisky and Carrier 2010

<sup>6</sup> McIsaac, Park and Toupin 2013

<sup>7</sup> Hoskins and Meilleur 2012: 1

<sup>8</sup> Skinner, Speilman and French 2013

<sup>9</sup> Fleming and De Vita 2001

## **METHODOLOGY**

This report is guided by this question: What capacity-building frameworks, models and strategies best support the development of youth-led organizations and initiatives in order to improve their organizational impact and sustainability?

In order to answer our research question, we first conducted a rapid review of existing research in order to identify key bodies of knowledge. As a result of our scoping review, and after an exhaustive search, we determined that there is a lack of research evidence related specifically to building the organizational capacity of grassroots youth-led organizations and initiatives.

Given the lack of available research related to our research question, we broadened our scope and examined available evidence related to two lines of research that represent more established (though still emerging) bodies of knowledge: 1) non-profit organizational capacity building frameworks and models; and 2) non-profit organizational capacity building strategies and outcomes.

We conducted a desk review of the literature using both national and international sources. Searches for recent publications on these topics were conducted through the York University Library Catalogue, select research databases, and Google Scholar. The literature selected includes books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and online reports/papers from universities/major philanthropic organizations published after 2000. The limits of this review include the lack of longitudinal studies and the limited availability of empirical short or medium-term studies for both of the research strands, as well as language constraints beyond English and French.

The findings that we present draw on research literature related to organizational capacity building in the non-profit social service sector generally. Grassroots youth-led organizations

and initiatives fall into this broader category, operate within similar conditions, and face similar challenges. However, characteristics of grassroots youth-led organizations and initiatives also distinguish them from the non-profit sector as a whole. For example, the grassroots youth-led sub sector not only faces the same extreme precarity as other grassroots non-profits, struggling to secure and maintain financial and human resources, they also cope with high staff and participant mobility exacerbated by the nature of “youth” as a time of exceptional transiency and change. While we draw conclusions and make recommendations based on the literature we reviewed, we caution readers to carefully consider the context of your capacity building work and adapt recommendations as needed. We also recommend that future research and evaluation focuses specifically on building organizational capacity within the grassroots youth sector.

## **STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT**

We present the results of our literature review in three sections. The first section of the review focuses on understanding the *concept* of capacity building. The second section focuses on *models* for assessing organizational capacity. The third section identifies *strategies* for building organizational capacity. The report concludes by synthesizing the findings and offering recommendations for building the organizational capacity of youth-led organizations and initiatives.

## WHAT IS ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY?

The first task of this review is to understand what is meant by ‘capacity’. By first establishing a basic understanding of capacity, we can then review models and strategies for developing it. Unfortunately, this presents a challenge as there is no single accepted definition of ‘capacity’ that applies to a grassroots youth-led organizational contexts, and neither is there one that applies to the non-profit sector more broadly.

Within the literature, ‘organizational capacity’ is conceptualized and operationalized in a variety of ways. Capacity can be viewed as the ability of an organization to successfully achieve its mission.<sup>10</sup> It may manifest in an organization’s ability to operate effectively under uncertain and dynamic conditions. Kapucu defines it as follows:

**“Capacity is an output of basic organizational activities such as fundraising, partnerships, board development, leadership, mission, financial management, strategic planning, governance, physical infrastructure, technology, and program evaluation.”<sup>11</sup>**

Because organizations differ in purpose, structure, history, and context, Herman and Renz argue that organizational capacity building efforts must always take the unique characteristics of an organization into consideration.<sup>12</sup> Gryger, Saar, and Schaar of McKinsey and Company define organizational capacity broadly, as “anything an organization does well that drives meaningful results.”<sup>13</sup> This definition builds on one of the most widely-cited conceptualizations of organizational capacity put forward by Honadle (1981) who states that organizational capacity allows an organization to serve rather than merely survive.<sup>14</sup>

Capacity building enhances an organization’s effectiveness to achieve their mission. Efforts can include leadership support,

technical assistance, and inter-organizational collaboration. At its core, capacity building is “about systematically building organizations that have the clout to make a sustainable difference to pressing, social, economic and environmental problems”.<sup>15</sup> Capacity building is not about creating unnecessary work or challenges for an organization, nor is it intended to create more policies and bureaucracy.

## MODELS FOR ASSESSING ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Three models serve to illustrate key perspectives in the discussion of organizational capacity. Each emerges from a distinct group of stakeholder-participants in the growing movement to support capacity building: the first from the world of consulting firms; the second from that of major funders; and the third from that of applied academic research.

The sheer diversity of purpose between non-profit organizations makes it difficult for the evaluation literature to settle on an authoritative assessment model, but it is easier to establish a robust vocabulary of clear, easy-to-understand terms that can guide individual discussions. One such vocabulary was formulated by McKinsey and Company and cited often since its publication (see Figure 1).<sup>16</sup> The McKinsey team proposed that organizational capacity be divided into “higher-level” (more abstract, cognitive or strategic features) and foundational elements (concrete resources and relationships). These two sets of three elements are suspended in a unifying seventh element that represents an organization’s collective culture, often-unspoken and unwritten norms of behaviour that tie everything together. Table 1 adapts the definitions of these elements from the McKinsey and Company model.

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<sup>10</sup> Linnell 2003

<sup>11</sup> Kapucu 2007: 12

<sup>12</sup> Herman and Renz 2008

<sup>13</sup> Gryger, Saar and Schaar 2010: xx

<sup>14</sup> Honadle 1981

<sup>15</sup> Kapucu 2007: 12

<sup>16</sup> McKinsey and Company 2001, cited in PriceWaterhouseCoopers 2011

<sup>17</sup> Adapted from *ibid.*

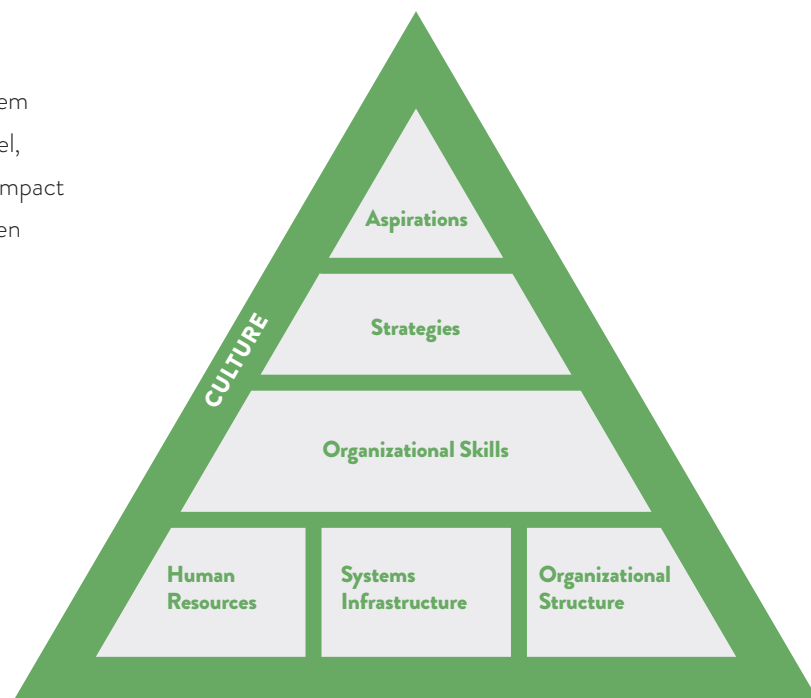
<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*

**Table 1: McKinsey and Company framework for understanding organizational capacity** <sup>17</sup>

Element of Capacity		Examples
<b>Cognitive Elements</b>	<b>Aspiration</b>	Documents, statements and symbols that speak to an organization’s sense of purpose and mission, such as a mission or vision statement.
	<b>Strategy</b>	Plans drawn up within an organization to organize the activities that will let it meet its goals.
	<b>Organizational Skills</b>	The sum of an organization’s ability to carry out critical tasks not directly related to its mission activities, such as budgeting, building stakeholder relationships, and measuring performance.
<b>Concrete Elements</b>	<b>Human Resources</b>	The skills and capabilities of everyone involved in an organization, from volunteers to staff and board members.
	<b>Systems and Infrastructure</b>	All of the physical resources supporting an organization’s activities, as well as technology and processes (such as, for example, billing).
	<b>Organizational Structure</b>	The rules that determine how an organization is governed and how it operates from day to day, including for example the job description
<b>Unifying Elements</b>	<b>Culture</b>	The norms of attitude, thought and behaviour that permeate the life of the organization – an important example being attitudes towards the measurement of performance.

While these elements are interrelated, organizations are encouraged to reflect on them individually, as well as collectively. In this model, organizations can achieve the greatest social impact by engaging in capacity building across all seven elements within the pyramid.<sup>18</sup>

**Figure 1: McKinsey and Company Capacity Framework (2001)**





**Figure 2: The Ontario Trillium Fund Capacity Building Model (2005)**

Some funders of non-profit organizations are recognizing a need to support capacity building activities in addition to narrowly-focused mission-oriented activity. Robertson, writing for the Ontario Trillium Fund (OTF), states this plainly, arguing that a framework for organizational capacity building is a necessary step in any plan to maximize the impact of funded programs.<sup>19</sup> The Ontario Trillium Fund model (see figure 2) outlines four interrelated pillars of capacity building: Relevance, Responsiveness, Effectiveness and Resilience. The pillars are strong metaphors, in the sense that organizations must seek to be “well-balanced” between them, implementing a strategy that encompasses each. Under

this model, “building capacity” is a process of strengthening these pillars, boosting any leg of the table which comes up short. Each pillar, in turn, has multiple components, and organizations need to be aware of these in order to create a winning strategy.

**The four pillars of the OTF model are:<sup>20</sup>**

**Relevance:** Organizational capacity includes a knowledge of the communities in which they are situated, their history, demography, economy and environment. This knowledge, which balances attention to needs and assets, helps align organizational mission and activity.

<sup>19</sup>Robertson 2005

<sup>20</sup> Adapted from *ibid*: 16



**Responsiveness:** Organizations don't just seek to understand their communities, but also to build relationships with them that normalize consultation and collaboration as core activities. This responsive set of relationships makes organizations inclusive and engenders a shared vision of success with stakeholders.

**Effectiveness:** Effective organizations are those that have robust internal processes (such as board governance, program evaluation and good management), as well as the right resources and tools to ensure their programs and services are effective.

**Resilience:** Resilient organizations navigate rapidly-changing places and times by fostering soft skills such as leadership, creativity, strategic thinking, and a culture of continuous learning. They have concrete plans to manage change and to continually identify and build upon their strengths and assets.

The rapid growth, both in numbers and significance, of the non-profit sector has attracted significant academic interest, and some projects have merged capacity-building support with research. Youth Research and Evaluation eXchange (YouthREX) is one example of this phenomenon; another was the Capacity Building Institute (CBI) based at the University of Central Florida.<sup>21</sup> A CBI study, reflecting upon their applied work, reports four areas critical for building organizational capacity as identified by non-profits themselves in a needs assessment: organizational development, asset development, community linkages, and programs and activities (see table 2).<sup>22</sup>

These four categories provide a starting point for any assessment-led capacity building initiative working with small grassroots non-profit initiatives, but also offer room to expand and adapt as needed.

**Table 2: Elements of Organizational Capacity organized by Organizational Need<sup>24</sup>**

Area of Capacity	What needs does capacity address in this area?	Where do we act to build this area of capacity?
<b>Organizational Development</b>	Recruitment, training, equity and diversity, financial management	Boards, staff, volunteers, administrative procedure
<b>Asset Development</b>	Resources to sustain operations, and to seek new opportunities	Fundraising, communications, strategic planning
<b>Community Linkages</b>	A strong network of potential supporters, collaborators and allies	Stakeholder relationship management, thought leadership, community engagement
<b>Program and Activities</b>	Continual improvement, sustainment and expansion of existing programs	Program design, evaluation and the implementation of recommended changes

<sup>21</sup> Since 2008, the CBI has been renamed the Centre for Public and Nonprofit Management. See: <https://www.cohpa.ucf.edu/cpnm/>.

<sup>23</sup> Fleming and De Vita 2001

<sup>24</sup> Adapted from Kapucu 2012

<sup>22</sup> Kapucu 2012

## STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

In practice, understanding an organization's capacity building needs is not an easy process, partly because there is no established list of core characteristics of effective organizations.<sup>23</sup> Strategies to support building organizational capacity cover a broad range of practices and interventions, but they contain a few consistent themes. To provide responsive capacity building, reported strategies consistently recommend individual assessments and a cycle of ongoing evaluation and feedback, to ensure that the capacity building needs of the organization are being addressed in a flexible and timely manner.<sup>25</sup>

Another perspective on the same argument would be that capacity building cannot be sequestered into a discrete project with a clear end-point. When considering the variety of capacity-building strategies, Linnell observes:

**“there is a large range of capacity-building approaches – a continuum – that includes peer-to-peer learning, facilitated organizational development, training and academic study, research, publishing and grant-making. Adding to the complexity, capacity building also takes place across organizations, within communities, in whole geographic areas, within the non-profit sector, and across the sectors. It involves individuals and groups of individuals, organizations, groups of organizations within the same field or sector, and organizations and actors from different fields and sectors. Capacity building takes place amid everything else that is going on in a non-profit's experience. It is very difficult to isolate a capacity building intervention from all the factors that lead to it, happen during it and proceed afterward.”<sup>26</sup>**

Moreover, Bonnell and Zizys argue that for effective implementation of any programming, youth-led and

youth organizations must invest in strengthening their organizational capacity by creating an environment of constant learning.<sup>27</sup> Efforts to build organizational capacity would therefore include investing in “staff and volunteers, through training and professional development, and through effective management support and supervision,”<sup>28</sup> so that internal stakeholders buy into, and understand their role in the overall effort.

External stakeholders, such as funders, must establish their role in a capacity building project as well. Robertson summarizes funder-driven organizational capacity building strategies as belonging to one of two categories. In the first, funders who wish to build capacity among grantees take a community development approach, collaborating with each of them – and all of them together. In the second, funders take a less collaborative but more focused approach, acting as a service provider and offering grantees technical support to strengthen their organizational structures.<sup>29</sup>

Given the need for specificity and flexibility in the shaping of capacity-building efforts, the Alliance for Nonprofit Management summarized eight success factors, synthesized from then-current capacity building experiences and literature, that organizations should consider when implementing capacity building strategies.<sup>30</sup> These frames are meant to reflect a theory of change regarding how effective capacity-building projects achieve their goals (see Table 3).

The summary of success factors can be broken down into more specific literatures that examine some of the phases and components of capacity building more concretely. Researchers on organizational capacity have done deep dives

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<sup>25</sup> Linnell 2003

<sup>26</sup> Bonnell and Zizys 2005

<sup>27</sup> Kapucu 2007: 12

<sup>28</sup> Kapucu 2007: 12

<sup>29</sup> Robertson 2005

<sup>30</sup> Backer 2001, cited in Linnell 2003

## CASE EXAMPLE 1

# Capacity Building with Grassroots Youth Organizations

### WHO

Strengthening Community Organizations to Promote Effectiveness (SCOPE)

### ABOUT

This project provided capacity building for grassroots non-profit organizations in Detroit. SCOPE defined capacity building as “activities and actions aimed at improving an organization’s ability to fulfill its goals.”

### ACTIVITIES

Capacity building activities and actions focused on governance and board development, strategic planning, technology improvements, and management training.

### APPROACH

SCOPE’s approach to capacity has some resonance with a Positive Youth Development framework – their work is guided by empowerment theory, which focuses on people’s capabilities instead of their weaknesses or risk factors. Empowerment theory also stresses the importance of context. SCOPE’s approach to capacity building is guided by research and practice in the field of organizational change.

#### **They have a three-stage process:**

- 1. Preparing for change:** assessing organizational strengths/weaknesses; attitudes about change; and capacity for change
- 2. Transformation:** knowledge sharing; planning; and enhancing program delivery through development, planning, and evaluation
- 3. Readiness for change:** changes made to organizational structures and processes; improved programs; better resource stability; and a demonstrated commitment to organizational changes that align with mission and vision

#### **The services are targeted specifically to grassroots groups by:**

- 1. Paying attention to sequencing:** assessment, targeted workshops to improve foundational knowledge/skills, and then planning for change
- 2. Using empowerment theory to guide the work:** groups are afforded some degree of self-determination

## CASE EXAMPLE 2

# Capacity Building with Grassroots Youth Organizations

### WHO

Bayview Hunter's Point Community Fund

### ABOUT

The Bayview Hunter's Point Community Fund was a grant-making and capacity building initiative (from 2001-2014) that focused on providing capacity building opportunities to the smaller grassroots youth development organizations.

### ACTIVITIES

The Community Fund did things like provide operational supports; access to funds for capacity building; flexible multi-year funding; and limit reporting requirements.

### APPROACH

They avoided one-size-fits-all models, instead working with grantees to identify their organizations needs and establish individualized workplans with them. Workplans were carried out with support from the Community Fund. Ongoing coaching was provided during monthly meetings. Where the Fund staff were unable to provide the capacity building supports required, external assistance was sought. Long-term investment, frequent one-on-one meetings, and the use of external technical experts were seen as key to the success of the Bayview Hunter's Point Community Fund.

Their work highlights the importance of creating capacity building strategies that are responsive, individualized, flexible, and included a willingness to learn on the part of the capacity building organization. Capacity builders need to commit to offering flexible and individualized supports, so that organizations can pursue big-picture objectives (like strategic planning and evaluation) and the day-to-day issues that organizational leaders must also address.

Source: BAYCAT 2014

**Table 3: Success Factors for Effective Organizational Capacity Building** <sup>31</sup>

<b>Success Factor</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Timely</b>	Capacity building activities must be rapid enough to respond to change, but not so hasty as to miss measuring changes from one intervention before implementing the next.
<b>Peer-connected</b>	Capacity building projects should incorporate opportunities for peers to network and share information, as well as establish mentoring relationships.
<b>Assessment-based</b>	A capacity building project should be founded on a needs assessment, both of the organization and its surrounding community and stakeholders.
<b>Contextualized</b>	Capacity building projects should not treat the organization as a completely independent and disconnected entity; it should strengthen the services and relationships that flow between the organization and its stakeholders, funders and community.
<b>Customized</b>	Strategies for building capacity should respond to the research questions posed by stakeholders, collecting the right kinds of data to answer them from diverse sources.
<b>Comprehensive</b>	When capacity builders offer help and resources to organizations, they should attempt to gather a full spectrum of those resources in a “one-stop shop.”
<b>Readiness-based</b>	Capacity building projects are less effective when embarked upon during a period of already-existing crisis. A certain degree of organizational stability is required for success.
<b>Competence-based</b>	Capacity building is a professional activity. Effective services are more likely to come from both well-trained providers, and they are more likely to be incorporated by well-informed consumers.

on aspects of capacity building projects such as networking, customization and adaptation, readiness, and timelines.

### Networked Approaches to Capacity Building

Just like individuals, no organization is an island; effective capacity building can advance collectively within the non-profit sector as lessons and ideas are shared. Group workshops, peer-learning opportunities, collaboration and networking with other organizations within a sub-sector is beneficial and improves organizational effectiveness.<sup>32</sup> Organizations value opportunities to share with others facing similar policy context and service delivery challenges, as well as opportunities to discuss comparable program outcomes. Bonnell and Zizys argue that building partnerships and collaborations is essential for the ongoing development and survival of youth initiatives.<sup>33</sup>

Networking and community development approaches increase social capital, which in turn creates the potential for more systemic strategies (e.g., comprehensive, integrated programs, or broad coalitions advocating policy changes). Sobeck et al. point out that from their organizational capacity building experiences with grassroots youth-led groups, clear communication about what the process of what capacity building entails is essential.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, Executive Directors need to be prepared to face positive and negative outcomes/effects of, and reactions to, organizational growth due to the capacity building interventions/adjustments. Having clear leadership, management, and someone who will be adept at focusing on the concerns of the capacity building process are a must for success.

### Adaptive and Customized Capacity Building

A site-specific, customized plan is essential to successful capacity building. The literature also advocates for flexibility in capacity building supports, for example by building in opportunity for mid-process course correction if the initial project activities uncover unexpected needs or challenges.<sup>35</sup> Cornforth and Mordaunt remind us that “circumstances change, [therefore capacity builders] may uncover deeper problems or actions may have unintended consequences” and that without the ability to re-align capacity-building projects, the day-to-day tribulations of non-profit work can easily take precedent over longer-term, strategic activity.<sup>36</sup>

### Capacity Building Readiness

For successful capacity building to be realized, it is essential that the organization is ready and open to change.<sup>37</sup> As is the nature of non-profit, grassroots organizations, untimely events or crises may occur but it is crucial that an organization is able to allot sufficient time and attention to the supports and interventions.<sup>38</sup> Along the same line, an organization having a clear notion of its purpose and strategy is fundamental, as without this, they will never reach their full potential. Notably, McKinsey and Company found that organizations that were willing to assess and revamp their aspirations (i.e., their vision and strategy) experienced the greatest benefits; the culture of regular assessment and measurement was, in their 2001 survey, very limited, however, and its adoption arguably, still an ongoing process today.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Adapted from Linnell 2003: 27

<sup>32</sup> Kapucu, Healy and Arslan 2011; Millesen and Bies 2007; Sobeck, Agius and Mayers 2007

<sup>33</sup> Bonnell and Zizys 2005

<sup>34</sup> Sobeck, Agius and Mayers 2007

<sup>35</sup> Cornforth & Mordaunt 2011. See also BAYCAT 2014; Management Sciences for Health 2010; Robertson 2005

<sup>36</sup> BAYCAT 2014

<sup>37</sup> Kapucu 2007

<sup>38</sup> Cornforth and Mordaunt 2011; Sobeck, Agius and Mayers 2007

<sup>39</sup> McKinsey and Company 2001

### Capacity Building Timelines

Developing a realistic timeline for capacity building is essential, ensuring methods are fitting yet flexible.<sup>40</sup> The literature emphasizes that capacity building takes time.<sup>41</sup> Capacity building can require upwards of five years before organizations can demonstrate significant progress toward their goals. McKinsey and Company caution that nearly everything about capacity building in non-profit organizations can be lengthier and more complicated than expected.<sup>42</sup> However, as PricewaterhouseCoopers note, “the benefit - enhanced outcomes and sustainability - is worth the investment.”<sup>43</sup>

### CONCLUSION

There is a growing recognition that young people need to be supported in taking the lead to address issues relevant to their community and experience. Capacity builders need to work with youth-led organizations and initiatives in order to support them in stabilizing their organizations, improving their effectiveness in meeting their objectives, and deepening their commitment to evidence-based practice.

This report reviews frameworks and strategies for supporting organizational capacity building. Due to a lack of literature specific to building the capacity of grassroots youth organizations and initiatives, this report expanded the scope to focus on a general non-profit context. The two case examples of organizational capacity building with grassroots youth-led organizations and initiatives demonstrate the potential of integrating and adapting key themes to meet the needs of this specific group.

While we offer evidence-based suggestions for orientating organizations to the work of capacity building, ultimately there is no ‘ready-made’ strategy for building organizational capacity. Each organization will have its own unique strengths to build on and needs to address.

Generally, capacity building efforts can be categorized as enhancing either internal or external processes and outcomes. Capacity builders should assess an organization’s readiness, provide flexible and adaptive supports, develop realistic timelines, and consider including a community development approach across multiple, related organizations. It is imperative that capacity building programs with small, grassroots/unincorporated organizations are tailor made, individualized interventions – a one-size fits all model has proven to be ineffective in reaching such goals.<sup>44</sup>

With the growing recognition of the strategic social and organizational importance of capacity building, non-profit organizations that are mainstream or grassroots, adult or youth-led, should use the tools provided in this report to assess their own needs, and where possible pursue opportunities to meet their capacity building goals, thus enhancing their impact and producing improved outcomes for all.

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<sup>40</sup> GEO 2015

<sup>41</sup> McKinsey and Company 2001; PriceWaterhouseCoopers 2011

<sup>42</sup> Mckinsey and Company 2001

<sup>43</sup> PriceWaterhouseCoopers 2011: 10

<sup>44</sup> Millesen and Bies 2007; Kapucu, Healy and Arslan 2011; Yung, Leahy, Deason et al. 2008.

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