

Building to Last:

A GRANTMAKER'S GUIDE TO STRENGTHENING NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

BY PAUL CONNOLLY

Creating a Blueprint for the Future

Today, as society relies more and more on nonprofit organizations to provide critical services, grantmakers and their nonprofit grantees share common concerns: how to make better use of limited resources in the face of growing need, and how to stay the course and reach established goals in a volatile, changing environment. Increasingly, grantmakers and nonprofits alike are turning to the same strategy to address these concerns: enhancing organizational effectiveness.

“Let’s start with an assumption, a belief, if you will: that a nonprofit organization is more likely to reach its programmatic goals if it is well managed,” says Barbara Kibbe, program director, Organizational Effectiveness, at the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

“That assumption is the foundation of our Organizational Effectiveness Program.” In recent years, that program has grown exponentially. Although the foundation has supported capacity building among its grantees since 1983, the budget for Organizational Effectiveness has jumped from \$1.3 million in 1996 to \$12.3 million in 1999.

Many private and corporate funders have joined

Packard in the effort to help build effective nonprofit organizations that have the capacity to manage and sustain high-impact programs. The Foundation Center reports that in 1999, funders included in the center’s index awarded \$135,424,000 in grants specifically for technical assistance to nonprofit organi-



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Serving organizations that serve the public good.

Private Foundations – Corporate Community Involvement – Nonprofit Organizations

zations, more than double the amount for these types of grants in 1989. (See chart on page 3.)

Trustees, donors, and regulators are demanding greater accountability from nonprofits financially and programmatically, resulting in increased attention on not only *what* nonprofits do, but also *how* they do it. A younger generation of philanthropists practices a more engaged style of grantmaking and expects a greater return on its investment. They too are demanding greater attention to organizational effectiveness.

Over the past several years, a critical mass of funders interested in organizational effectiveness has formed, leading to the emergence of a more sophisticated community of study and practice. Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, an affinity group formed only a few years ago, now has over 300 members. Other funder networks, including Grantmakers in Health, Grantmakers in the Arts, and regional associations, offer programs related to organizational capacity building.

Why such widespread agreement on the need for organizational effectiveness? Many grantmakers who invest in building the capacity of nonprofit organizations do so to enhance programs and performance and, ultimately, create more value. Growing numbers of funders clearly believe

that investing in capacity building is an effective way to leverage the impact of their philanthropic resources. As Michael Porter and Mark Kramer explain in *Harvard Business Review*: “By

What is Capacity Building?

“Capacity building” refers to activities that strengthen an organization and help it better fulfill its mission. Capacity-building efforts include:

- referrals
- publications
- training
- convening
- peer exchanges
- one-on-one consulting
- new equipment and staff
- facility purchase and renovation

Capacity building can occur in virtually every aspect of an organization, including programs, management, operations, technology, human resources, governance, financial management, fund development, and communications.

helping grantees to improve their own capabilities, foundations can affect the social productivity of more resources than just their slice of the whole.”¹ Simply put, effective organizations promise to get better results with available resources. And that is a promise worth pursuing for today’s value-conscious grantmakers.

What makes an organization effective? According to Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, it is “the ability of an organization to fulfill its mission through a blend of sound management, strong governance, and a persistent re-

- a vital mission
- high-quality, well-regarded, relevant programs
- capable and motivated leadership, management, and staff
- clear communications and accountability
- a well-organized board with able and involved members
- efficient operations and strong management support systems
- solid finances, with reliable and diverse revenue streams

For more than two decades, The Conservation Company has been helping nonprofits enhance their organizational effectiveness and assisting funders in planning and evaluating their capacity-building activities. We have learned a great deal from the way these groups have met the challenges

they faced in achieving their goals. This paper highlights some of the most useful lessons we have learned about how to help develop effective nonprofit organizations.

“Pew has always supported services, and that will continue to be our primary work. But now we’ve made additional resources available to help nonprofit organizations respond to the tremendous changes in their operating environment. It gives these agencies an opportunity to do some thoughtful planning and analysis, to improve their capacity. And to do these things without compromising programs while they

shore up infrastructure.”

— Frazierita Klasen, Assistant Director for Local Programs, Health and Human Services Program, Pew Charitable Trusts

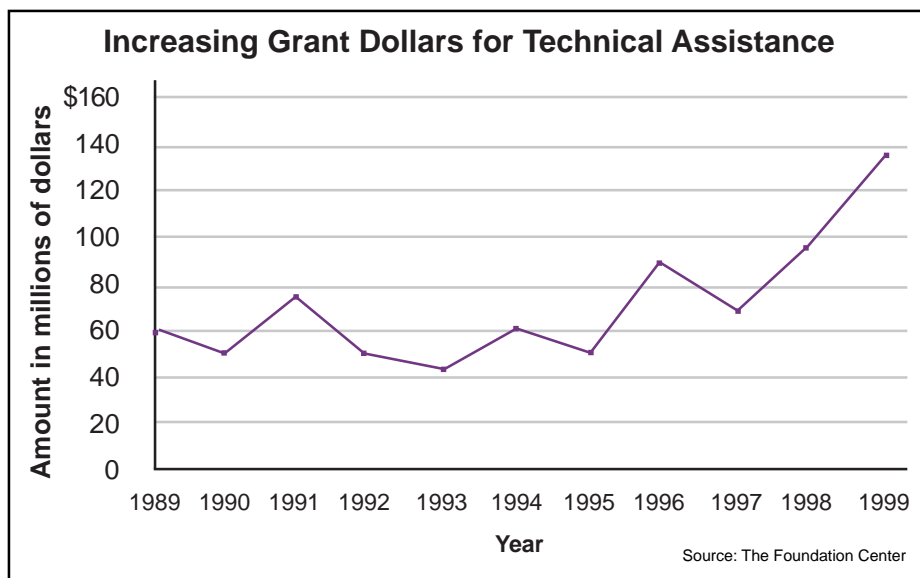
dedication to achieving results.” Although it is hard to define exactly what an “effective” organization looks like, most successful nonprofits share the following characteristics:

Funders and Capacity Building: Then and Now

Although funders' interest in strengthening the capacity of nonprofit organizations is growing, it is not new. Pioneering organizations and individuals have long supported and promoted organizational effectiveness. For the last several decades, some local foundations in many parts of the country have earmarked grants for management and technical assistance for community-based groups. The Ford Foundation has invested in stabilizing arts organizations and strengthening community development organizations nationwide for the past 20 years.

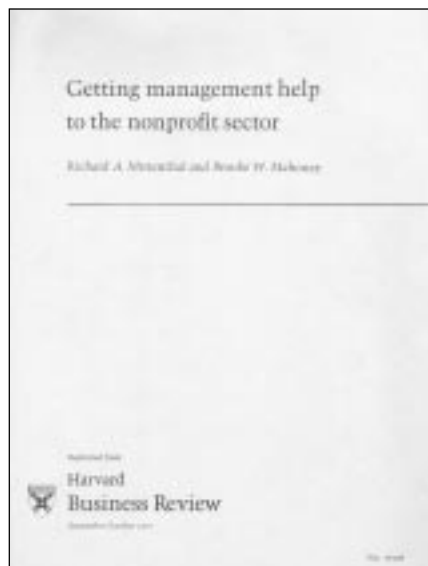
In 1977, Richard Mittenenthal, The Conservation Company's president, coauthored an article in the *Harvard Business Review* titled "Getting Management Help to the Nonprofit Sector." The piece described how nonprofit organizations were more concerned about service delivery than management and explained that funders often overlooked "helping the recipients of their charitable dollars to manage themselves better."²

What has changed since the article was published? According to Mittenenthal, "Many of the fundamental challenges remain the same. Most nonprofits still do not pay enough attention to management concerns. The majority of large national foundations continue to limit funding to



special programs and short-term projects, creating disincentives to good management, rather than supporting

zational infrastructure diverts money from those who directly benefit from program services.



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the organizational capacity building that nonprofits need. Many funders still believe that funding core organi-

“Yet, there has been notable progress. The sector has professionalized as more nonprofit executives have received formal management training. Just look at the growing number of MBA and MPA programs that now include nonprofit-oriented courses. The number of capacity builders has increased, and their quality has improved. In addition, the approach to capacity building has broadened; it has grown from being mostly remedial and intervention-based to encompassing organizational systems, skill transference, and continuous learning. And more and more, funders are not only investing in organizational effectiveness but also dedicating resources to evaluating the results of those investments.”

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Laying a Strong Foundation:

A Step-by-Step Process for Funders to Enhance Nonprofit Organizational Effectiveness

The starting point for you, the funder, is to acknowledge that building capacity is building for the future. The work must be sound, beginning with the foundation. It is best to start with a solid plan that stems from your funding organization's mission, then proceed, step-by-step, toward goals based on both internal strengths and external necessities.

Step 1: Assess Community and Organizational Needs

What are the organizational needs of nonprofits in your community and how are they being met? (See list below.) To answer those questions, you must first define what "community" means to your funding organization: current grant recipients, organizations working in a specific field, a geographic area?

The New York Community Trust and United Way of New York City retained The Conservation Company in 1993 to survey nonprofit organizations in New York City to determine their management assistance needs. This study revealed that fundraising, marketing, and strategic planning were the most pressing issues.³



When diagnosing organizational problems, keep in mind that nonprofit organizations are complex systems. A symptom may be caused by an underlying difficulty. For instance, an executive director may believe that fundraising is the area where her organization needs the most help, but

board development is actually the essential issue that needs attention.

Develop a holistic and flexible approach to providing assistance. Also remember that needs vary according to stages of organizational development. And make sure you assess context as well. Are other funders addressing some of the needs in the same community? Are there gaps in assistance? Are specific trends – for instance, in public policy, the real



estate market, or technology – creating new management assistance needs?

Step 2: Acknowledge Your Foundation's Values

A foundation's core principles and operating style will help shape how it wants to allocate resources to encourage organizational effectiveness. For example, if your foundation's trustees want to encourage financial self-sufficiency, then you might choose to concentrate on supporting the development of earned income ventures among grantees. If your

Organizational Needs

Some areas where nonprofits may need help:

- evaluation
- organizational development
- business planning for revenue-generating activities
- legal issues
- facility planning
- marketing and communications
- financial management
- operations
- fund development
- organizational assessment and development
- governance
- program design and development
- human resource management and training
- strategic planning
- leadership development
- technology and information systems

foundation's mission promotes achievement of certain outcomes, you may want to help grantees increase their capacity to evaluate programs and track results.

Step 3: Determine Available Resources

Funders have varying levels of financial resources to commit to supporting organizational effectiveness. After determining your budget, figure out the best strategy for allocating your resources. Sometimes concentrating on one or two highly focused strategies is the best way to maximize impact.

Intellectual capital is another critical resource available to funders. Take advantage of the knowledge other funders and capacity builders have gained. Find out if there are existing models for the approach you are considering.

Step 4: Set Your Goals and Objectives

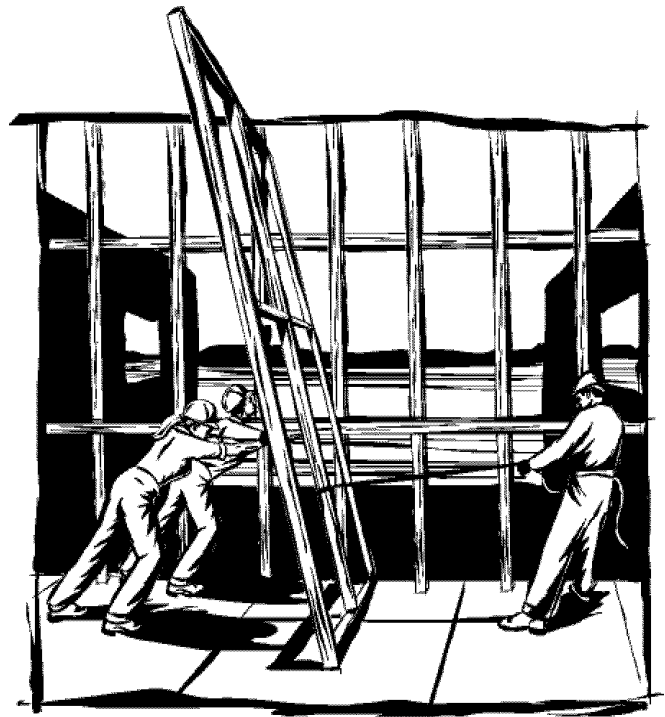
Because capacity building is such a broad area, capacity-building initiatives can have a broad range of goals. The Community Foundation of Santa Cruz's Management Assistance Project, for example, aims to "support and strengthen the management skills and practices of local nonprofit staff and board leaders, and to provide opportunities for ongoing learning and improvement."

Set specific and measurable objectives based on your goals. This lays the groundwork for evaluating the success of your effort. As your work proceeds, you will be able to monitor whether objectives are being achieved and revise them if necessary. For example, one of the objectives of the Learning Circles Project, which was managed by InnoNet and funded by the Fannie Mae Foundation, was to "increase skills to create a program plan, an evaluation plan, and a fundraising plan among ten participant organizations through training sessions, peer-to-peer interaction, and one-on-one assistance."

Step 5: Select Strategies

There is a wide range of methods that funders can use to support nonprofit organizational effectiveness. (These are described in detail on pages 6 and 7, "Tools to Build Organizational Effectiveness.") While some approaches are geared toward providing direct assistance to nonprofit organizations, others focus on supporting capacity builders, intermediaries, researchers, and educators, who in turn provide benefits to nonprofits. Most of the methods involve providing financial resources through grants and loans, but a funder can also provide direct management assistance.

Select an approach based on your objectives, resources, values, and operat-



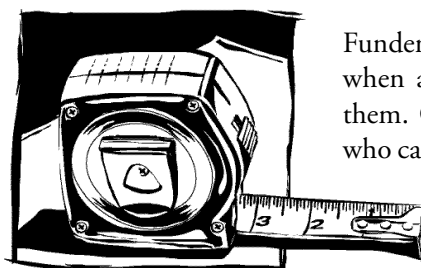
ing style, as well as on organizational and community capacities and needs. You do not have to choose just one method; frequently, a combined approach is the best course of action.

Step 6: Evaluate Your Efforts

Evaluation is an important management tool for grant-makers. Assessment findings can help a funder decide whether to devote more or fewer resources to a particular grantee or initiative. They also enable grant recipients to learn from their efforts and make improvements. By sharing results of evaluations, funders can help others in the field benefit from their experience.

For example, the Corporation for Supportive Housing evaluated its capacity-building program for a group of organizations by measuring baseline indicators for organizational health and then tracking their progress in reaching performance benchmarks over time. The evaluator found that the participating nonprofits used strategic plans more, became fiscally stronger, and improved their administrative systems. The evaluation also discovered that peer-to-peer exchanges were an especially effective management assistance strategy for the participants.⁴

Funders should be willing to pay for evaluations when asking grant recipients to participate in them. Consider retaining an external evaluator who can offer an objective perspective. (See "Setting Up a Solid Framework: The Challenge of Evaluating Capacity-Building Efforts" on page 8.)



Tools to Build Organizational Effectiveness

Nonprofit Program Grants That Promote Organizational Effectiveness

You do not have to create a special program to support organizational effectiveness. In fact, you may get better results by integrating capacity building into the regular grantmaking process. To that end, you might fund management assistance as a component of a grant; liberalize rules on indirect costs; include matching requirements; and award multi-year grants to increase organizations' ability to plan and implement program initiatives. The Environmental Support Center, based in Washington, D.C., has produced guidelines for environmental grantmakers on how to take organizational issues into account throughout the entire grantmaking process.

General Operating Support Grants

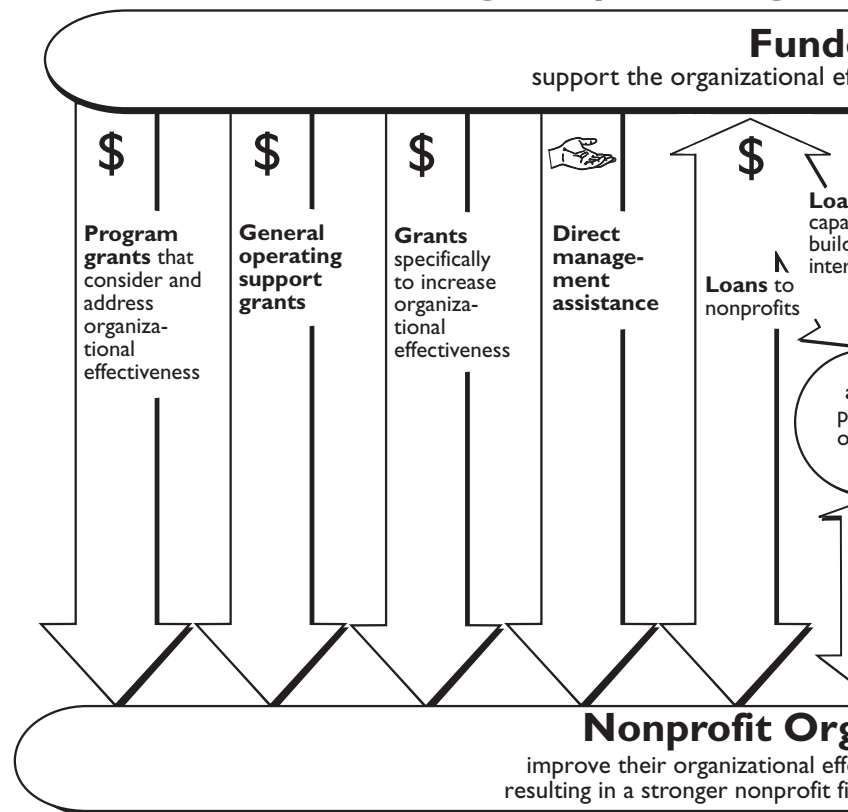
Some philanthropies believe that judicious funding for general operations is a critical driver for organizational effectiveness. The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation dedicates about half of its arts funding to providing support for general operations and typically makes three-year operating support grants.⁵ Christopher F. Edley, former president of the United Negro College Fund, notes that grantmakers who provide support for programs without funding general operations "insist on feeding us caviar when our schools are starving for rent and bread and water."⁶

Grants to Nonprofits Specifically to Increase Organizational Effectiveness

More funders are awarding targeted grants to nonprofit organizations to support particular activities aimed at building organizational infrastructure, such as strategic planning, board development, or staff training. Funding such activities typically complement, rather than replace, program grants.

The Philadelphia-based Independence Foundation provided funding to Project Salud, a nurse-managed primary health care clinic, to enlist the help of The Conservation Company to assess its options and plan for the future. Marjorie Buchanan, former senior program officer, describes the dilemma faced by the clinic. "Project Salud has a long history of doing wonderful things. But this clinic, effective as it was in providing health care, was not well positioned to take advantage of the reimbursement mechanisms of today's health care market. So Project Salud needed to come up with a plan if they were going to survive." Executive Direc-

Many Tools for Building Nonprofit Organizations



tor Anita O'Conner comments on the plan's usefulness: "The plan is good for many reasons, but first it is good because it is based on our assets. It gives us a better chance, and something more. It gives us hope that we can continue to serve this community from a position of strength."

Loans to Nonprofits and Intermediaries

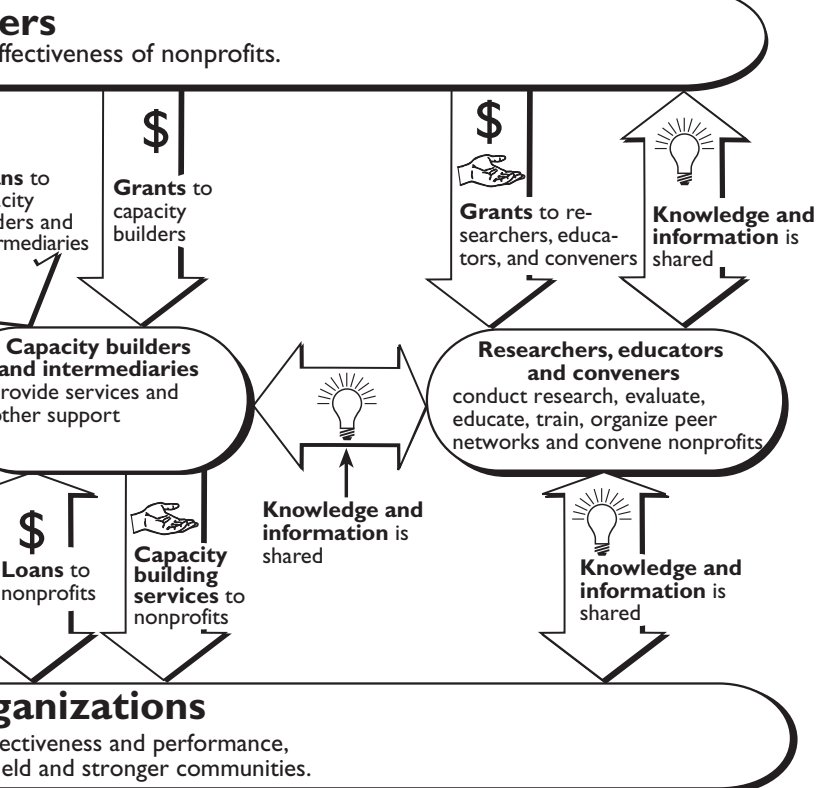
You can extend financial support to nonprofit organizations by lending money for cash flow, working capital, social purpose business ventures, and capital projects. Usually, you would make loans and program-related investments at below-market rates to nonprofits directly or through such intermediaries as the Nonprofit Finance Fund. In this way, you can stretch your resources without depleting them.

By lending money to nonprofits, you can help them gain access to capital, improve their financial position, and institute healthy financial practices. Some foundations, such as the Connecticut-based Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, make working capital loans to provide nonprofits with unrestricted, flexible cash to enable them to grow.

Support to Capacity Builders and Intermediaries

You can enhance nonprofit organizational effectiveness by supporting groups that provide management assistance to nonprofits. These capacity builders include nonprofit man-

For One Job: Organizational Effectiveness



agement assistance and training providers, independent consultants, and private consulting firms.⁷ You can also fund intermediaries – such as National Arts Stabilization, Corporation for Supportive Housing, and Local Initiatives Support Corporation – to provide management support to nonprofits in a particular sub-sector. There are many ways to support capacity builders and intermediaries: making referrals or establishing contracting relationships with them, subsidizing the provision of their discounted services, and strengthening their organizational capacity.

As reliance on capacity builders increases, funders have begun asking: “How can we build the capacity of the capacity builders?” A 2000 study of the capacity-building field by the Human Interaction Research Institute for the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation revealed that many providers duplicated services and were only marginally effective. The report anticipates a shake-out in the field and predicts that providers offering evaluation-based and theory-driven services are most likely to survive.⁸ The Clark Foundation is currently supporting efforts to enhance the consulting and training skills of management assistance providers in New York.

Grants to Conveners, Educators, and Researchers

There are many ways you can help build the skills of nonprofit leaders. You can create opportunities for them to can-

didly discuss shared concerns and learn from one another. In 1980, The Meadows Foundation helped establish The Center for Nonprofit Management in Dallas, Texas, which provides meeting space where nonprofit managers can talk confidentially. Other funders, such as The Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, support learning circles and peer exchanges that facilitate active learning and skill building.⁹

You can also fund the education of nonprofit managers. Citigroup, along with a number of other funders, has supported the Local Initiatives Support Corporation’s Capacity-Building Program in New York, which began in the early 1990s. This program has enabled community development corporation (CDC) leaders to receive training at Columbia University’s Institute for Not-for-Profit Management. The institute’s director, Lori Roth, explains why this effort has been effective: “Many CDCs started off as neighborhood visionaries with few resources. But now, many of these groups have staff of over a hundred and manage hundreds of units of housing. To keep their operations running, leadership and advanced business skills are critical.”¹⁰

In addition, you can support rigorous empirical research on nonprofit organizational issues, including the effectiveness of specific types of capacity-building efforts. Such research can help answer hard questions, such as “What types of management assistance are most suitable for small, community-based groups?” or “How should the next generation of nonprofit leadership be cultivated?” This research should be practical and results should be disseminated.

Direct Management Assistance

You might want to join a small but growing group of funders that provides management assistance directly to nonprofits. Some venture philanthropists, like The Entrepreneurs Foundation in Silicon Valley, go so far as to place foundation representatives on grantee boards.

Another engaged grantmaker, the Robin Hood Foundation, provides “one-stop shopping” for management and technical assistance. Robin Hood uses both foundation staff, most of whom have backgrounds in management consulting, and outside consultants, including The Conservation Company, to provide strategic planning assistance to grant recipients. According to Deputy Director Lisa Smith, “We have believed in and supported strategic planning since our founding. Most of our grant recipients are chronically under-resourced and operate in a crisis mode. Without planning, their work becomes reactive rather than proactive; they get done whatever crosses their desk that day. Planning helps keep organizations focused and on-mission.”

Setting Up a Solid Framework:

The Challenge of Evaluating Capacity-Building Efforts

BY PETER YORK

Common sense tells us that a well-run organization will be more likely than an ineffective organization to operate productive programs, meet its goals, and survive unfavorable changes in its external environment. But precisely what effect do capacity-building activities have on organizational functioning? And how do capacity-building efforts affect the provision of services or, most important, the lives of people who depend on those services? These are difficult questions, but it is important to try to answer them. The best way to do that is through evaluation.

The most important determination is whether the grant or assistance made a difference. Rigorous evaluations designed to go beyond distributing client-satisfaction surveys and documenting services delivered are most likely to provide the needed information. Among the first steps in assessing the relationship between capacity-building efforts and organizational and programmatic effectiveness is examining the implicit assumptions underpinning the relationship and making them explicit. In other words, evaluators must spell out how organizational capacities directly contribute to the effective delivery of programs and services and, consequently, to achieve intended outcomes for clients.

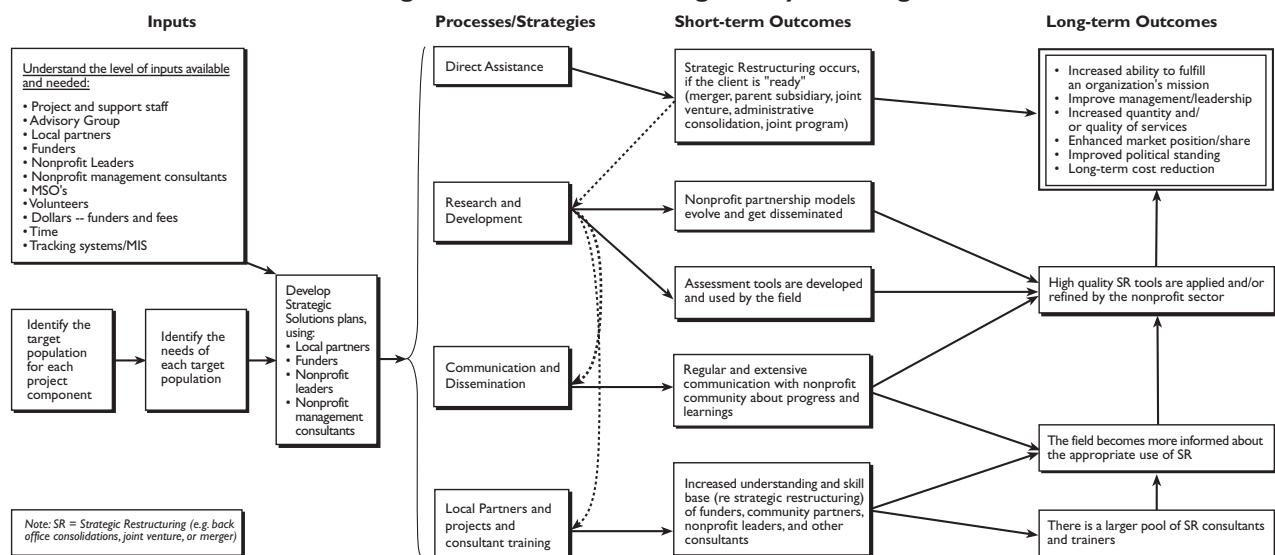
How, for instance, will strategic planning, fundraising, or board development enhance the delivery of particular services? And how do the resulting service improvements benefit recipients more than if a strategic plan did not exist, fundraising efforts were weak, or the board was ineffective? By charting the relationship among organizational capacity, programs, and desired client outcomes, funders and nonprofits can develop a theoretical framework that can form the basis for a comprehensive evaluation plan.

A case in point: since 1999, The Conservation Company has evaluated Strategic Solutions, a multi-year effort supported by

the James Irvine Foundation, David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The initiative aims to influence the nonprofit sector's perception, understanding, and use of strategic restructuring, a model for developing partnerships among nonprofit organizations, ranging from joint ventures and back-office consolidations to mergers. Through this program, La Piana Associates was awarded grant support to provide consulting assistance and training services, conduct research, and disseminate information. The Conservation Company began its evaluation by helping the funders document the assumptions and a theoretical framework for the program (see exhibit below). Once this logic model was developed, the evaluation team was able to design methods to assess inputs, strategies, short-term outcomes, and long-term outcomes. Martha Campbell, director of evaluation and program director at the James Irvine Foundation, comments on the benefits of this process: "The logic model made the underlying program rationale and program goals more explicit and shared across the funding partners and grantee. It also provided a framework for dialogue about the evaluation findings and ways to improve the program design over time."

Keep in mind that external evaluations, especially those driven by funders, may prove threatening to grantees. Grant recipients may fear revealing information about sensitive organizational issues to a grantmaker. It is important for all parties — funder, capacity builder, evaluator, and grantee — to be in agreement about what information can be shared and with whom. Funders also need to encourage grantees to evaluate their capacity-building activities for their own planning purposes, allowing grantmakers to at least be informed of the process, as appropriate. Once grantees see the value of evaluation in relation to fulfilling their missions, they will be more likely to institutionalize the evaluation process, thereby becoming true learning organizations.

Strategic Solution's Overarching Theory of Change



Some Constructive Advice

The work of building effective nonprofit organizations is difficult, complex, demanding – and rewarding. There is no single right way to do it. But there are some general guidelines for funders, summarized here, that may make your efforts more effective, no matter which way you choose to promote organizational effectiveness.

First, Do No Harm

Recognize the imbalance of power between the funder, capacity builder, and nonprofit. Be cautious about giving management advice and avoid being overly intrusive. A meddling grantmaker can sometimes worsen an organization's situation. Since a funder seemingly possesses more power than a grant recipient, some capacity builders or nonprofits, fearing a possible loss of funding, may follow a grantmaker's unwise advice, with damaging results.

Develop Clear Expectations Regarding Confidentiality and Communication

Funders, capacity builders, and nonprofit organizations frequently become engaged in a triangular relationship. (See exhibit to the right for a depiction of the dynamics of this interaction.) This occurs when a funder supports a capacity builder to assist nonprofits, has a capacity builder on retainer to provide services, or supports a nonprofit in purchasing the services of a management assistance provider.

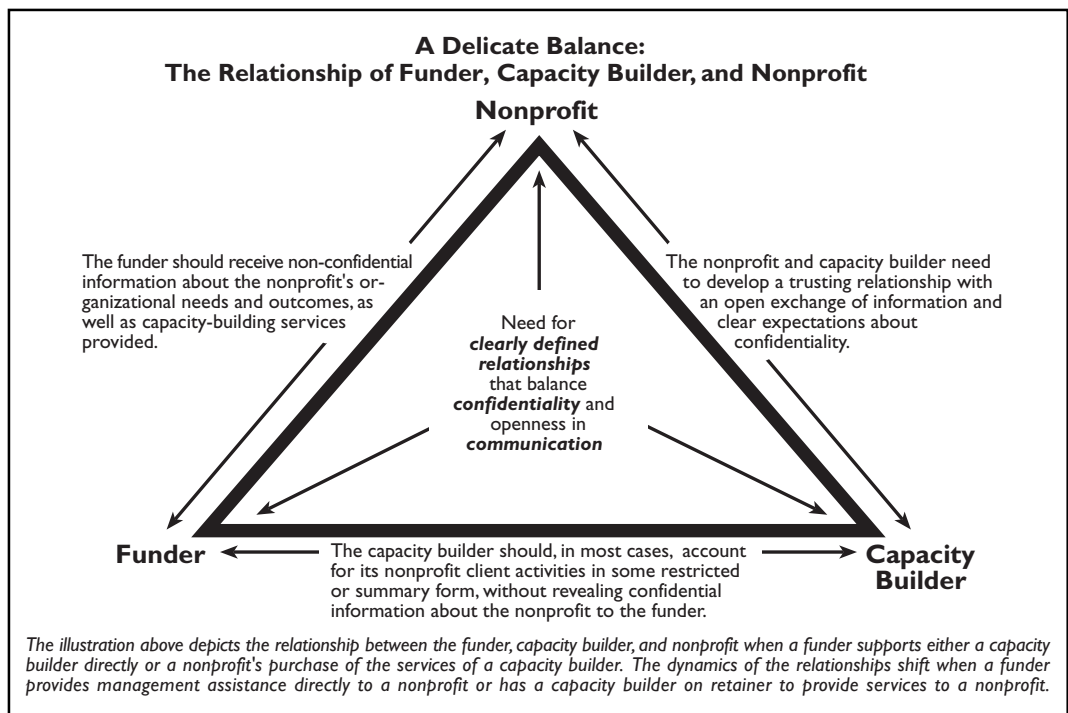
You must strike the right balance of confidentiality and openness appropriate to each of the three sides in this

partnership, respecting boundaries while encouraging communication. Information is power, and it must be distributed judiciously to keep this delicate relationship functioning well. The nonprofit and capacity builder need to trust each other, exchange information freely, and establish clear expectations about confidentiality. To improve its management and governance, a nonprofit often must “air its dirty laundry” to assistance providers. This leaves the nonprofit vulnerable. The capacity builder must respect this vulnerability in accounting to the funder. In some cases, client activities should be reported in a restricted or summary form, providing relevant

help. Although some nonprofits can benefit from strategic planning, others may not need or be ready for it. Context matters: when an organization is in crisis, for example, an outside consultant trying to conduct a visioning exercise may be the last thing it needs. Some nonprofit leaders learn best by reading or listening to an expert lecture, but others benefit most from one-on-one coaching and peer mentoring.

Be Patient and Flexible

Organizational capacity building is a time-consuming, long-term process. To succeed, you must be flexible, patient, and willing to take risks. After managing the DeWitt Wallace-



material about organizational needs, capacity-building services, and outcomes, without revealing privileged information.

Remember that One Size Does Not Fit All

You should tailor management assistance to organizational need. Nonprofits at different stages of organizational development need different types of

Reader's Digest Management Initiative, a program through which a team of consultants provided management assistance to youth-serving organizations, the Fund for the City of New York advised nonprofit executives that “hiring a consultant means that the leaders and managers will have more, not less, work to do.”¹¹ Make sure everyone involved in your capacity-building program understands that

change takes lots of time and hard work. As the evaluator of the James Irvine Foundation's project to enhance the effectiveness of employment and training organizations pointed out, "The importance of investing time in conveying the project's value and being explicit about the work involved should not be underestimated."¹²

Coordinate Efforts with Other Funders

Before embarking upon a new capacity-building initiative, learn about existing models and services. Why reinvent the wheel or pursue a strategy that has proven to be ineffective? Organizations such as Grantmakers for Effective Organizations and the Alliance for Nonprofit Management are helping to establish clearinghouses for ideas related to organizational effectiveness. Take advantage of these resources. (See "Resources" on page 11.)

Consider collaborating with other funders on your effort. Do not forget to coordinate your work with government agencies, many of which support management assistance for their nonprofit contractors and grantees.

Keep the Focus on Mission

Effective management and governance are means for nonprofit organizations to achieve their missions and visions;



they are not ends in themselves. An excessive focus on professionalism and business models can bury idealism. As William Ryan, a fellow at Harvard's Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations, cautions, "There is a growing discomfort by many within the sector that a corporate ideology of 'managerialism' is threatening to displace the values and passion that nonprofits aspire to."¹³

A Final Word

Today, nonprofit organizations are being asked to respond to growing needs with limited resources. They are expected to remain steadfast in their missions and meet ever-higher standards of performance in a rapidly changing environment.

We rely more and more on nonprofit organizations to reach our common goals. Their work is critical. Grantmakers must help them acquire the tools they need to do it well. And enhancing organizational effectiveness is one of the most

promising strategies available. By helping to build the capacity of nonprofits, funders can help build strong organizations that will continue to meet the vital needs of our society for a long time to come.

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3) National Organizations

Alliance for Nonprofit Management. 1899 L Street NW, 6th Floor, Washington, D.C. 20036. (202) 955-8406. www.allianceonline.org

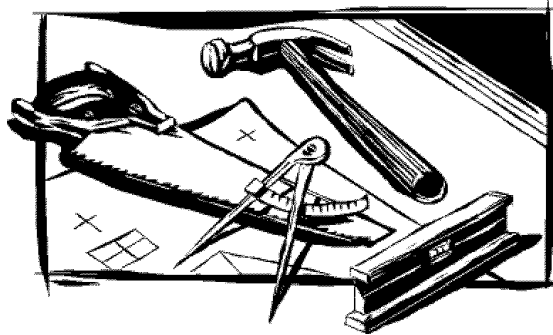
Applied Research & Development International. 6740 E. Hampton Avenue, Suite 111, Denver, CO 80224. (303) 691-6076. www.ardi.org

The Aspen Institute Nonprofit Sector Research Fund. One Dupont Circle NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20036. (202) 736-5800. www.nonprofitresearch.org

Grantmakers for Effective Organizations. 300 Second Street, Suite 200, Los Altos, CA 94022. (650) 917-7127. www.geofunders.org

National Center for Nonprofit Boards. 1828 L Street NW, Suite 900, Washington, D.C. 20036-5104. (202) 452-6262. www.ncnb.org

National Council of Nonprofit Associations. 1900 L Street NW, Suite 605, Washington, D.C. 20036-5024. (202) 467-6262. www.ncna.org



THE CONSERVATION COMPANY

About The Conservation Company's Work in Capacity Building

For over two decades, The Conservation Company has helped strengthen nonprofit organizations in fields as diverse as human services, education, arts and culture, health care, the environment, community development, and advocacy. The firm has also assisted a variety of funders to plan, implement, and evaluate capacity-building activities, including UBS PaineWebber, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, The New York Community Trust, Medical Health Research Association, Pfizer Inc, The Ford Foundation, and The Robin Hood Foundation. In addition, The Conservation Company has helped the Indiana University Center on Philanthropy and New York Regional Association of Grantmakers design training sessions on funder-initiated capacity-building strategies.

Our Services to Grantmakers

Our distinctive competence ranges from establishing foundations, to assessing grantees and their needs, to developing funders' internal processes and external communications strategies. We have extensive experience in helping private foundations, corporate community involvement programs, and government agencies understand and improve both grantmaking and organizational issues.

Grantmaking

- Grantmaking strategy and assessment — reviewing past initiatives and refining strategies.
- Program design and evaluation — assessing initiatives that are under consideration, identifying “gaps” in the field, identifying opportunities to leverage funding, and developing and implementing evaluation systems.
- Grant program management — developing RFPs, reviewing and evaluating specific proposals, identifying potential projects, and supervising program implementation.

Organization and Management

- Strategic planning — guiding foundations through a rigorous and goal-oriented planning process.
- Organizational assessment and development — developing processes for administering grant programs, evaluating foundation/grantee interactions, and assessing programs and staff.
- Formation — working with the benefactor's legal counsel to create the foundation, developing initial program goals and strategies, establishing grant application requirements, facilitating board development, and creating a staffing plan.

Funders also ask us to work with a grant recipient to develop a comprehensive strategic plan, conduct an organizational assessment, help develop board and staff capacity, and otherwise improve the nonprofit organization's effectiveness.

Our Services to Nonprofit Organizations

The Conservation Company provides an array of consulting services that can help nonprofit organizations address operational and environmental challenges. As a result of their work with us, our clients are able to:

- Generate more revenues from a wider base of support
- Operate more efficiently
- Enjoy more productive board-staff relationships
- Become better known in their communities and fields
- Improve and expand their programs and services

These successful outcomes are achieved through individualized assignments tailored to meet each client's needs and circumstances. Sometimes we are engaged for a short research or facilitation project. In other instances we provide comprehensive planning assistance over a longer time period or conduct varied activities over one or more years.

Our core services include:

- Strategic planning
- Organizational assessment and development
- Governance review and board restructuring
- Program feasibility assessment, design, and evaluation
- Business planning
- Environmental scanning and benchmarking

Our clients come from all parts of the nonprofit community and are at different stages in their growth cycles. They include new organizations that are just beginning to plan, emerging organizations requiring assistance in designing systems and structures as they prepare for growth, as well as established institutions reshaping their approaches and operations to address new demands.

Assignments are sometimes initiated by a thoughtful executive director or other senior manager seeking to improve the organization's functioning and work. In other cases, a concerned funder, board member, or other key stakeholder recommends and provides financial support for our involvement.

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Serving organizations that serve the public good.

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