***Building What?***

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Every organization has four "core" capacities: adaptive, or the ability to respond to changes in the internal or external environment; leadership, which provides direction; management, which ensures the efficient use of resources; and technical, the delivery of programs and services. Often there comes a point when an organization realizes that in order to grow, these capacities need to be improved, or "built" upon so that it can better fulfill its mission and serve its constituency, as well as increase the board's and staff's level of knowledge. This can be accomplished through a variety of ways, including an organization-wide assessment, business planning, fund, staff, or board development, technical or financial system upgrades, and facilities planning.

Here are a few things to keep in mind as you plan for, and complete, a capacity building initiative:

1. Are you really ready for this? A board and staff committed to the project, strong programs, no crises, and a strong sense of needs and future priorities are the foundation of a successful capacity building effort.

2. Prioritize. Trying to do everything at once will get you nowhere. Instead, determine the goals by assessing what you can accomplish during the initiative's duration.

3. Build on your strengths, don't try to fix your weaknesses. Capacity building is not a way to solve problems, although a few can be dealt with along the way. It's an exercise to figure out what you do well and how you can do it better.

4. Don't put it in a vacuum. Often capacity building happens outside of day-to-day operations. It shouldn't be.  Embed it in your culture so that building on successes and improvement are part of everyone's daily mindset.

5. One size does NOT fit all. While organizational challenges are commonplace, yours are unique to you just as your mission is unique to you. Therefore, tailor your capacity building to your needs and resources - don't try to duplicate what others have done. And beware the consultant who doesn't really listen to your concerns and merely gives standard solutions.

6. All Aboard! All internal stakeholders need to be involved in the process and be wiling to accept change. Clarify roles so each knows their part.

7. Don't forget the follow-through. Like strategic planning documents, capacity building reports are often put on the shelf and left to gather dust. The report itself is seen as the accomplishment. Well, it's not. Make sure you include an implementation plan and hold all involved accountable for their part.

8. Be patient. Change happens gradually, and it often takes years to see results.

For a little more reading:

[*Venture Partners' Effective Capacity Building in Nonprofit Organizations*](http://www.vppartners.org/sites/default/files/reports/full_rpt.pdf)

[TCC Group reports](http://www.tccgrp.com/knowledge/capacity.php)

[SSI Review](http://www.ssireview.org)

[Nonprofit Quarterly](http://www.nonprofitquarterly.org)

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