

What is Movement Capacity Building for Nonprofit Organizations?

The Building Movement Project held regional discussions to deepen our understanding of how to enhance and support the vision and mission of progressive social change organizations. Our question is how do organizations develop strategies and structures to facilitate the process of building momentum towards social change, and when do strategies and structures hurt this momentum? While both forms of capacity building are important, below are some key differences between capacity building for organizational sustainability and capacity building for social justice and change.

Organizational Capacity Building

- * Establishment of separate 501(c)3 organization with a staff-driven, hierarchical structure
- * Organizational development focusing on sustainability and distinguishing its work in a competitive market
- * Participation in targeted coalitions related specifically to organizational program activities and interests, such as funding
- * Diversity training aimed at inclusion without changing culture of organization
- * Sustainability oriented towards funding sources.
- * Professional development and training on the Executive Director and senior staff level

Movement Capacity Building

- * Emphasis on cross-organizational work, education about the issues, and constituency involvement in decision-making.
- * Analysis of how organization and its activities fit into a larger vision for social justice
- * Association of social change organizations that discusses political education, analysis, strategies, and constituency involvement to develop deeper systemic change
- * Awareness and challenge of building a multi-cultural/ethnic movement and the impact on organizational policy and practices
- * Dialogue between funders and social change groups on how to work together on systemic change. Constituents contribute financial and other resources.
- * Open discussion on how to prepare for generational shift in leadership, and ongoing support during transition

Where Can I Learn More?

- Visit www.buildingmovement.org to find out what you can do and for more information on Generational Shifts in Nonprofit Leadership and Integrating Social Change into Social Service Agencies.

Features of Movement Capacity Building for Nonprofits

There have been significant resources dedicated to the development of nonprofits' organizational capacity. However, far less attention has been paid to the capacity of groups to support movement for social change. Below are nine areas the Project identified as important building blocks of movement capacity of nonprofit organizations.

Vision: The organization has a statement of the world it wants to create and a theory of how change is made, including the role the organization plays in the larger social change arena and to whom the organization views itself as accountable.

Principles: Based on its vision of social change, the organization develops values that are applied within and outside of the organization.

Learning and Reflecting: The organization allocates time for its staff and constituents to learn and reflect on the organizational vision through presentations, readings, discussions, or arts/culture. The organization reflects on its work in order to refine its vision and strategies.

Issues of Race and Power: The organization considers society's "dominant culture" and how this culture is, often unconsciously, replicated within the organization itself. The organization analyzes how the effects of race, class, gender, and other cultural factors impact its work.

Work Across Boundaries: The organization builds relationships with other agencies, groups, and individuals to create a movement, and supports other groups without trying to "own" every issue or campaign.

Work Across Generations: The organization has a mechanism for transferring trust, power, and responsibility from older leaders to younger ones, while educating younger leaders about the complexities of social change work and inspiring their involvement in these issues.

Constituent Involvement: The organization has a mechanism by which to promote meaningful constituent involvement that goes beyond just staff, board and funders. The organization also directs resources toward constituency involvement, within and outside of the organization.

Structure: The organization creates a system of effective leadership, management, and accountability while remaining creative and flexible in internal and external problem-solving. The agency collaborates with other organizations to bring about social change.

Funding: The organization recognizes and has transparency about the impact that funders' priorities have on the organization's work. The organization also examines how to maintain accountability to its constituents, particularly when funding comes from sources other than the organization's constituent base.

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