



If Capacity Building Takes Years, Why Do We Keep Looking for Success After a Few Months

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If you look around the non-profit sector, you'll find a wide range of ambitious plans. You'll find efforts to eliminate intergenerational poverty, revitalize entire communities, or end hunger. And you'll also find a disconnect in how we measure and support these long-term efforts. Often, we provide short-term supports (e.g., finding a new leader, organizing a board retreat or facilitating a strategic planning process) and neglect the consistent support that leads to enduring results.

In the formulation of our latest strategic plan, Support Center began to imagine a way we can empower non-profits through an integrated community platform to promote long-term organizational transformation. While we had kept in touch with organizations over the years moving from one planning project to another, we had never intentionally structured a program for this purpose. We had never fully articulated what it would mean to be a partner towards mutual success rather than an individual service provider. Nor had we fully reconciled how to nurture organizations so that they have the inherent skills to build their own capacity.

We imagined a more relationship-based, long-term, flexible, and integrated approach to building an organization's capacity. One that would engage a group of organizational leaders--and not just one leader--to identify and navigate the needed changes ahead. Thus in 2018, we launched the Navigator Program, our new approach to long-term capacity building efforts.

In many ways, Support Center's Navigator Program is just one possible response to the mismatched expectations in *our* work. And we certainly need others. Here are a few realities that confound the work of any capacity builder:

- Capacity building--an investment in the future sustainability and effectiveness of an organization--is fundamentally a long-term strategy that requires multiple approaches.
- People and organizations need a range of support across facilitation, coaching, consulting, and guidance to be more effective and sustainable.
- Organizations at all stages of development can use help with identifying, measuring and monitoring key performance indicators to better understand their failures and successes.
- Traditional consulting ends with a deliverable, typically some planning document, but seldom addresses the capacity needed for execution....

The most frustrating aspect of these realities is that there is a wide range of capacity building support across finance, compliance, HR, strategy and governance that goes untapped due to a lack of time and awareness.

Taking these challenges into account, Support Center intentionally designed the Navigator Program's approach's as a long-term organizational coaching model for long-term means of capacity building. After an initial organizational review (Support Center uses the [iCAT](#) for established organizations and a start-up assessment tool for newly established organizations), Support Center then debriefs the results, giving various stakeholders an opportunity to individually reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the organization and goals for the future. During this time, the organization's Navigator establishes a relationship with key stakeholders within the organization and begins to identify 3 to 5 areas for improvement that will ultimately build capacity for the organization. The Navigator and the organization's leadership use their intuition, the results of the report, and the experience of the debrief to inform and establish their priorities moving forward.

Navigators then help to establish a menu of priorities and indicators for ongoing measuring and monitoring. We liken this to an organizational FitBit and establish goals for the organizational equivalent of steps per day. Navigators guide organizations to monitor the things that we say are important, to map out the changes we want to see and to identify the key milestones along the way. The Navigators use Support Center's "Action Planning Template" to identify and prioritize organizational goals and indicators of success, as well as record progress, updates, or additional tasks on a monthly basis.

Since launching in 2018 we have worked with over 50 organizations, from startups to 100-year-old organizations, with budget sizes ranging from \$10K to over \$30M. And there are no doubt challenges ahead. Organizations are not yet accustomed to investing \$10,000 a year in a Navigator to help them chart their progress, and the concept remains new to the funding world.

This program doesn't leave organizations with a plan but rather engages them in the creation of a plan to build their capacity. In the process, we believe that we can help organizations to proactively identify and pursue opportunities to build upon their own self-driven capacity building. While the evidence may take years and not months to come into focus, this is the kind of long-term transformational approach that organizations, communities and causes need most. We can say with confidence, based upon a [recent evaluation of the program](#), that the role of the Navigator is distinct from consulting approaches and is a step towards transformational capacity building.