BILL & MELINDA GATES foundation

Informing Advocacy and Communications Capacity Building Efforts

A Robust and Culturally Responsive Tool for Assessment

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Introduction

In its theory of influence, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's (Gates Foundation) Global Policy Advocacy (GPA) team identified **advocacy and communications capacity building** as one important lever toward advancing policy and financing goals in developing countries where GPA investments are focused. The Gates Foundation engaged ORS Impact (ORS) to develop a culturally relevant, methodologically rigorous tool to learn more about successful capacity building—that is, what constitutes strong advocacy and communications; how foundation investments can best support organizations' advocacy and communications capacity; and how to document changes in capacity over time. For this work, ORS teamed with Fred Carden, principal of Using Evidence, and Janet Sawaya, principal of Sawaya Consulting.

The ORS team developed a comprehensive, multi-method advocacy and communications capacity assessment tool that includes input from organizational staff and external stakeholders. In 2017, the ORS team piloted the assessment with 19 GPA grantee organizations in 11 countries throughout Africa, Asia, and South Asia that work on issues related to health — specifically, immunizations, family planning, maternal/infant/child health, enteric and diarrheal disease, pneumonia, and neglected tropical diseases; nutrition; agriculture; financial inclusion, and community sanitation. This brief describes the assessment methodology, including rationale for the approach and the components of the tool. The brief also presents insights and considerations arising from the initial implementation that may be useful to others seeking to measure or document organizational advocacy and communications capacity in developing county contexts.

ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATIONS CAPACITY ASSESSMENT

Approach, Methods, and Tools

Overview of Approach

GPA's aims for an advocacy and communications capacity assessment included the following:

- **Rigor,** to be achieved via inclusion of external perspectives about capacity along with organizational self-assessment
- **Cultural responsiveness**
- **Comprehensiveness,** including both advocacy and communications capacity dimensions

Recognizing that there are several existing tools designed to assess advocacy capacity, the ORS team initially questioned whether a separate tool was needed to meet GPA's aims and purposes. After conducting a thorough review of 15 existing tools (see Appendix A), ORS concluded that none specifically addressed all three of GPA's aims. Thus, ORS create a customized assessment that included the following:

1. ***A staff survey*** that sought perceptions about ways of working and areas of work relevant to advocacy and communications efforts, completed by those in an organization most involved in and/or who oversee advocacy and communications efforts
2. ***Interviews with selected external stakeholders*** who had good familiarity with organizations' advocacy and communications efforts and were thus able to provide information that triangulated with staff perceptions about capacity
3. ***Facilitated review of findings*** with organizational staff to enhance data interpretation, ensure cultural nuances were considered and represented, and boost staff's ownership of findings

Review of existing advocacy capacity assessment tools revealed that the above approaches—that is, staff surveys, external stakeholder input, and direct engagement with participants—were not uncommon, though their use in combination was unique. Each data source provided distinct information, and implementing the survey, interviews, and facilitated review altogether provided a robust picture of organizational capacity. Collection of both internal and external perspectives about organizations' advocacy and communications capacity provided opportunities for triangulation and informed validation of the staff survey while facilitated reviews gave organizational staff the opportunity to participate in the assessment process in a respectful and meaningful way.

Purpose for Assessment

Review of existing capacity assessment tools revealed that their primary intent is to gauge current advocacy capacity or changes in capacity over time, not to assess or monitor grantee performance or the outcomes of grantees' advocacy. Of the tools reviewed, most were intended to document or elicit understanding about organizations' advocacy capacity to inform capacity building supports. Early in the project, the ORS team interviewed grantees and capacity assessment tool developers whose input highlighted the risk of conflating capacity assessment with performance assessment. This can ultimately subvert or entirely negate the validity and reliability of capacity assessment data since participants may worry that results will affect the likelihood of future funding and thus be disincentivized from candidness. When capacity assessment is clearly intended to be "diagnostic"—that is, when the clear and affirmed purpose of assessment is to provide a useful picture of capacity, understand changes in capacity related to input, and inform future capacity development—it is more likely that data will be valid, reliable, and helpful for both grantees and donors.[1]

Consistent with agreed-upon best practices, the purpose of GPA's capacity assessment was learning rather than monitoring performance. *Assessment was intended to discern grantees' strengths and opportunities* regarding advocacy and communications capacity; assessment was not intended to inform grant decisions, nor to specifically evaluate the results of grantees' advocacy and communications efforts.[2]

When capacity assessment is clearly intended to be "diagnostic"—that is, when the clear and affirmed purpose of assessment is to provide a useful picture of capacity, understand changes in capacity related to input, and inform future capacity development—it is more likely that data will be valid, reliable, and helpful for both grantees and donors.

Staff Survey Development

As noted, GPA sought a tool that would assess organizations' advocacy and communications capacity. While advocacy capacity may encompass specific communications skills or efforts, existing capacity assessment tools typically conceptualize advocacy more broadly.3 Within GPA's investments, strategic communications capacities—that is, communications aimed at advancing changes in specific stakeholders' knowledge, attitudes, or actions—are viewed as central to advancing policy and funding goals. GPA's aim was to understand grantees' capacities regarding communications implemented in support of a policy or funding goal—for example, the capacity to develop or disseminate messages intended to promote awareness or visibility of an issue or build support for an issue among a specific audience. Thus,

1 This point of view is consistent with conclusions drawn in a 2014 summit hosted by the United States' HIV/AIDS Bureau (HAB) Global Program within the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) that focused on identification of best practices for capacity assessment. The report published following that summit noted that the best capacity assessment occurs when there is a clear "developmental purpose" and assessment is conducted as "part of the overall goal of supporting local organizations to provide effective and sustainable services to the intended population." See http://www.classtoolkit.org/sites/default/files/documents/Report_HRSA%20HAB_ExpertConsultation_Feb%2015.pdf (Retrieved Feb 27 2017)

2 Although the assessment was not considered to be an evaluative effort, external stakeholder interviews did provide some directional information about the effectiveness and contributions of grantees' advocacy and communications, which was informative for both grantees and program officers.

3 While the ORS team also reviewed some tools that address communications capacity, these tools are aimed at broader communications capacities related to promoting organizational brand, reputation, or fund development rather than what is often called strategic communications associated with advancing advocacy and policy or funding goals.

the GPA assessment tool distinguished and specifically addressed discrete advocacy and communications capacities.

Survey items

Based on reviews of existing advocacy capacity assessment tools and other materials, input from GPA program officers and grantees, and the expertise of team members, the ORS team developed a staff survey framework that incorporated factors associated with strong, effective advocacy and communications. Survey items gauged staff perceptions about the following:

Ways of working believed to be common to many (if not all) organizations that implement advocacy and communications

General organizational capacity, which is likely to affect the strength of advocacy and communications efforts

Specific areas of work associated with advocacy and communications, applicable to some but not necessarily all organizations engaged in advocacy and communications

Capacity building experiences and their relative value and utility

Definitions

Recognizing that terms are defined or understood differently across countries and political and cultural contexts, the staff survey developed for GPA incorporated the following definitions, drawn from both the literature and input from grantees and Gates Foundation staff:

> **Advocacy:** the act or process of supporting a cause, a campaign, or a proposal
>
> **Communications**: a strategic approach to designing and delivering messages to shape perceptions and/or strengthen support among those who can positively influence a cause, a campaign, or a proposal
>
> **Capacity**: the ability of individuals or organizations to execute actions or perform functions and to set and advance goals or objectives

The staff survey was piloted with a sample of grantees and validated through a combination of analytical approaches.[4] Validation analysis along with input grantees provided during facilitated reviews helped inform revisions to the survey.[5] See Table 1 for a description of areas of inquiry addressed by the staff survey. The full staff survey is included in Appendix B.

4 Analytical approaches used for validating the survey tool included Cronbach's alpha, Exploratory Factor Analysis, Multi-Level Modeling (MLM) Regression, and coding and thematic analysis of qualitative data.

5 While most of the piloted survey questions were consistently understood by respondents, in a few cases, there were variations in interpretation or confusion regarding certain terms (e.g., *community member*). Discussion with staff during facilitated reviews helped surface areas of confusion or obvious differences in interpretation and led to clarifications that informed adjustments of the final version of the survey.

Table 1 | GPA Advocacy & Communications Capacity Assessment—Staff Survey Areas of Inquiry

Ways of working common to those engaged in advocacy and communications How well does the organization engage in relevant actions and behaviors? [6-point response scale: "we do this poorly" to "we excel at this"]	• Being strategic and adaptive in response to changing opportunity windows • Working collaboratively/in partnership with others • Engaging in measurement to support learning and evaluation about advocacy and communications efforts
Areas of work relevant to organizations engaged in advocacy and communications efforts Does organization engage in specific areas of work? [Y/N] How well does organization engage in relevant actions or behaviors? [6-point response scale: "we do this poorly" to "we excel at this"]	• Developing policy • Monitoring policy • Supporting implementation of a policy or program • Engaging civil society leaders • Engaging elected/government officials • Engaging those most affected by certain issues or policy decisions • Developing messages • Disseminating messages • Using data to make the case
General organizational capacity Agreement that organization has key assets [4-point scale: "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"]	• Advocacy/communications experience and expertise of staff • Funding and fiscal management • Staffing stability • Governance and leadership • Reputation and credibility
Capacity building experiences and their utility or value [Open ended]	• Past participation in capacity building or professional development in the areas of advocacy and/or communications • Most useful capacity building/professional development experiences • Areas where capacity building could be beneficial or strengthen the organization's efforts • Resources available to support organizational advocacy and communications capacity and/or growth in capacity

Interviews with External Stakeholders

The ORS team developed an external stakeholder interview protocol that included eight items paralleling those in the staff survey. These items sought external stakeholders' ratings of organizations' skills and capacities in specific areas of work associated with advocacy and communications. The external stakeholder interview protocol also included semi-structured open-ended questions to capture examples of organizations' advocacy and communications work, their roles and leadership of advocacy and communications-related efforts, and the extent to which external stakeholders perceived that grantees' advocacy and communications had made a positive difference. (The external stakeholder interview protocol is included in Appendix B.)

Facilitated Reviews

Facilitated reviews were an essential element of the assessment, as direct engagement with grantees is widely regarded as a culturally responsive data collection approach. Direct engagement with grantees promoted inclusive sense-making, built trust, and supported organizations' ownership of findings, which led to learning and improvement. Via facilitated reviews, staff had the opportunity to reflect on data and findings and explore a number of questions: *What resonated? Was anything surprising? What were similarities and differences in staff's views of organizational capacity? What were key take-aways?* Facilitated reviews also revealed nuance about the cultural contexts of advocacy and communications efforts that wouldn't have emerged otherwise—thus adding to the richness and quality of the data—and surfaced grantees' decisions and desired actions related to capacity building priorities.

Overview of Implementation

In 2017, the capacity assessment methodology was piloted with 19 GPA grantee organizations based in 11 countries in Africa and South and Southeast Asia. The pilot sample included as diverse a group of organizations as could be reasonably identified. Gates Foundation program officers recommended some pilot participants while others were self-nominated. Considerations for sampling included achieving a balanced mix of geography, topical areas of focus, size of organization, and the perceived strength of advocacy and communications efforts. Other considerations included grantee interest, minimizing burden for grantees relative to their context or the requirements of other data collection efforts, and perceived opportunities for learning.

Following sample selection, the ORS team conducted introductory calls with representatives of each participating organization in which the purpose, methods, and approach for capacity assessment was described. These calls were also an opportunity to identify staff most involved in and/or leading advocacy and communications efforts that would complete the survey and external stakeholders that could participate in interviews. Each organization was asked to identify six external stakeholders who were familiar with their advocacy and communications efforts and who would be willing to participate in a brief interview. External stakeholders included the targets of the organizations' advocacy and communications, partners or collaborators, issue experts, advisors, board members, and members of the media.

The following capacity assessment activities were implemented with each participating organization (*n* = 19) over a three- to four-month timeframe:

1. **Staff survey** [1]
2. **Interviews with external stakeholders** identified by organizational staff (most were completed by phone)[2]
3. **Preparation of organization-specific data summaries** that incorporated findings from both the survey and stakeholder interviews and served as the basis for facilitated reviews and—in keeping with principles of cultural responsiveness and the aim to promote learning—allowed grantee organizations the first opportunity to review their assessment data and findings
4. **Facilitated reviews**, conducted by a member of the ORS team either in person or via a webinar
5. **Preparation of final capacity summaries** that incorporated input and discussion from facilitated reviews, added clarity and detail (where needed), and included staff perspectives about data and findings, capacity building priorities, and potential next steps
6. **Debrief conversations with program officers** to share and discuss capacity summaries and the implications of organizational findings

How GPA and Grantees Used Assessment Findings

GPA grantees found the capacity assessment findings to be relevant and the approach to be useful. Across 144 staff from 19 organizations that participated in a facilitated review of data about their organization's advocacy and communications capacity, 80% said that the organizational data summary they received was relevant or very relevant, and 93% found the facilitated review to be worthwhile or very worthwhile.

1 The staff survey was implemented online, in English and French, using the Survey Gizmo platform. Of 159 advocacy and communications staff and managers identified across 19 organizations, 140 completed the survey for an 88% response rate.

2 A total of 86 stakeholders were interviewed, with the average being four to five stakeholders per organization.

In many cases, reviewing and discussing assessment findings helped grantees to better recognize opportunities and priorities for capacity building and identify steps to address them. In one case, the organizational leader and staff made concrete plans to share some of the findings with key advocacy partners during the facilitated review. In another case, advocacy staff brought forward the opportunities and priorities that emerged through the capacity assessment during the organization's strategic planning discussions, leading to the inclusion of capacity building priorities in their organizational strategic plan.

Looking at input from all 19 pilot participants, two frequently mentioned ideas for addressing advocacy and communications capacity building priorities included the following:

Intentional inter-organizational mentoring or coaching. For example, advocacy and communications staff from one grantee organization, a large international NGO, are embedded within different program areas. During their facilitated review, staff recognized variability in capacity across programs. Some program teams do better at gathering data that track progress and support learning about advocacy and communications efforts, while other programs are not as strong. Staff suggested that those working in program teams where capacity for data-informed learning is stronger could mentor others. Staff also suggested that as teams create data collection or progress-tracking tools, these could be shared and used across the organization.

Cross-organizational exchanges where multiple organizations come together to exchange best practices, experiences, or challenges such that lessons are transferred. Staff hypothesized that exchanges that purposefully engage similar types of organizations (e.g., membership organizations), those with aligned or shared goals, those working in the same country or region, or those working on similar issues could be beneficial. For example, one grantee addressing policy outcomes across multiple countries expressed interest in engaging with other organizations doing the same to identify and build knowledge about effective approaches to monitor policy implementation in certain geographies as well as cross-nationally.

The assessment tools and findings have also informed the Gates Foundation's thinking regarding capacity building and related supports. As part of the project, the ORS team supported GPA program officers' use of the staff survey to help frame their conceptualization of advocacy and communications capacity and promote clarity and consistency in organizational understanding and communications with grantees. As a result, program officers are able to use the staff survey to reflect on the capacities of organizations in their portfolios and discern if a full assessment would be of value or whether certain capacity supports may be warranted.

As noted, program officers (POs) engaged with organizations that participated in the pilot received detailed capacity summaries for organizations in their grantee portfolios. While capacity summaries frequently confirmed what POs knew or believed to be true regarding grantee capacity, POs found the detailed assessment findings to be helpful.

Organizational summaries provided the basis for POs and grantees to reflect together and consider ways to respond to the capacity building opportunities identified as most relevant to organizations' core efforts or advancement of the Gates Foundation's policy and financing goals. Subsequently, both grant investments and grantees' actions have directly addressed specific opportunities that surfaced via the capacity assessment.

"The findings from ORS' capacity assessment helped me shape the scope of a grantee reinvestment. I worked with the grantee to build a program that will leverage their strengths and work to address identified areas of opportunity and their capacity building priorities."—Gates Foundation Program Officer

"The capacity assessment findings sparked a conversation across the three POs who are funding the grantee organization about how to build capacity in the longer term. I don't know if we would have had that conversation without [the summary of organizational findings]. In addition, the findings were key in shaping the capacity building grant we ended up making to the organization. Initially, the grantee wanted to build an extra program with these funds but using the evaluation findings and really digging deep into what they wanted to achieve in the next few years, we were able to focus the proposal on filling some of the key gaps identified in assessment findings—specifically, policy analysis and M & E.

Gates Foundation Program Officer

"A common theme for my grantees was the identified gaps around measurement, learning, and evaluation (MLE) and communications at the national level. One grantee in particular has refocused some of their activities to address these gaps within our anchor grant, including hiring more staff in the countries in which we are working with them. They've dedicated more resources overall to MLE and communications and are sharing lessons learned across countries."—Gates Foundation Program Officer

Insights and Considerations for Future Implementation

Insights and Considerations for Future Implementation

Below are insights and considerations for funders, intermediaries, and evaluators seeking to explore and document advocacy and communications capacity with organizations operating in developing country contexts. Considerations are aimed at ensuring that capacity assessment delivers value for all stakeholders.

When the purposes of capacity assessments are explicit and reinforced, it maximizes the utility of findings.

The most productive capacity assessment occurs when all stakeholders are clear about the intention and purpose of capacity assessment. In the case of GPA's assessment, program officers and the ORS team clarified and repeated that the purpose of data collection was to understand capacity and capacity development opportunities, not to assess overall performance or inform grant decisions. In the future, capacity assessment may be implemented to understand changes in capacity resulting from specific supports. The validity of capacity assessment data can be threatened if organizations perceive that findings will be used to determine performance or eligibility for ongoing funding. If data collection is meant to gauge or monitor an organization's capacity, then the focus is on learning and growth. If data collection is meant to monitor an organization's performance or document outcomes resulting from advocacy, the effort should not be called a capacity assessment and a different type of methodology is needed.

The value of findings is maximized when surveys are implemented in ways that minimize power dynamics.

Implementation of the survey was designed such that organizational staff most involved in or overseeing advocacy and communications efforts had the opportunity to provide *anonymous* input. Therefore, the findings reflected staff's candid and unfiltered views and revealed differences in perceptions about advocacy and communications capacity across staff or between staff and leaders. As data summaries were shared with staff teams, survey findings prompted acknowledgement of and examination into what explained differences or unevenness in staff views. These honest discussions proved valuable, as staff were better equipped to surface truly meaningful capacity building priorities and opportunities. Without the opportunity to gather staff perspectives anonymously, staff with different views than their colleagues or the organizations' leaders may have been influenced by organizational power dynamics—for example, fears of reprisal for offering perspectives that ran counter to managers or executives—and may not have felt comfortable sharing their unique perspectives. As a result, the survey findings would not have been as informative, nor would they have surfaced the most useful and beneficial responses.

The multi-method assessment tool delivers robust data and findings.

The GPA assessment included perceptions about organizational capacity from both internal and external sources, which provided opportunities to triangulate data and boosted rigor. As noted, anonymous surveys provided a thorough—and sometimes uneven—picture of capacity. External stakeholder interviews were completed via convenience sampling from a list of external stakeholders provided by grantees. In some cases, it was challenging to complete more than a few interviews, though gathering and sharing perceptions from even a few external stakeholders provided staff with a valuable and useful opportunity to get critical feedback about their work.

Facilitated reviews helped unpack the meaning behind staff survey responses. As noted, survey findings offered an opportunity for organizational teams to reflect on the candid, sometimes differing views of staff. This created an opportunity for meaningful discussion, especially where there were disagreements, as staff sought to get clearer about organizational strengths and opportunities. Having external stakeholder feedback was helpful, as these data provided a point of comparison that enhanced staff teams' honest reflection. In addition, discussion during facilitated reviews helped clarify the meaning of survey ratings. In many cases, staff tended toward higher ratings on survey items, which tilted scale mean scores in a more positive direction. However, discussion during facilitated reviews helped illuminate consistent benchmarks across organizations that distinguished "strengths" from "areas of opportunity." Again, the external stakeholder feedback was useful to affirm perceived organizational strengths and areas of opportunity. Exploring findings with staff revealed agreement that for their core areas of work, ratings below benchmark scores indicated areas where capacity building was needed.

Direct engagement with those participating in capacity assessment conveys respect and cultural responsiveness.

In the case of the GPA assessment, direct engagement occurred via introductory calls, which clarified the purpose and methods for assessment, set expectations, allowed for grantees' questions to be answered, helped establish relationships between evaluators and grantee organizations that carried through the assessment effort, and facilitated reviews that provided grantees the opportunity to review and understand data and consider next steps before sharing data and findings with the Gates Foundation. Direct engagement reflects a culturally responsive practice often described as "nothing about us without us." Direct engagement, especially the facilitated reviews, gave grantees a role in the process and promoted their ownership of findings and follow-up action. Consistent with norms of cultural responsiveness, direct engagement—particularly when capacity assessment is initiated by a funder—reinforces that the process is being done *with* organizations, not *to* them.

Engaging organizational staff in data reflection and sense-making offers a productive capacity building opportunity.

As noted, facilitated reviews provided a meaningful opportunity for grantee organizations to discuss the findings from the staff survey and external stakeholder interviews. Most reviews included staff who had completed the survey; some reviews included a broader set of participants. Reviews allowed staff the opportunity to reflect on data and findings and to bring their voices and perspectives to the sense-making process. These sessions reinforced staff's confidence in the findings when there was agreement about organizational strengths and areas of opportunity or provided a chance for staff to better understand where and why perspectives about capacity differed and thus come to consensus about strengths and areas of opportunity. Discussion also helped staff to clarify advocacy and communications efforts that were core to their work, where capacity should be strong, and to consider where capacity building supports would be most useful. Reflecting on core areas of work, staff identified opportunities for capacity building and engaged in a prioritization process to identify capacities that were most important for achieving advocacy and communications goals. Because prioritization provided a focus, it often spurred discussion about specific next steps. By providing relevant information and prompting rich discussion and decisions, reviews functioned as a helpful capacity building exercise in and of themselves.

Facilitated reviews are likely to be most productive and helpful when organizational staff are well prepared and when leaders reinforce that the purpose of assessment is to promote learning.

Facilitated reviews yielded the most useful discussions when staff had reviewed the organizational data summary in advance and when organizational leaders reinforced that the focus of the summary was to surface and inform capacity development opportunities, not to assess or critique performance. If staff had reviewed summaries in advance, they were familiar with the data and could more easily explore their questions or areas of disagreement during facilitated discussion, add nuance to the findings, and identify and agree on relevant capacity building priorities. When staff had not reviewed the data summary in advance or when leaders viewed findings not simply as information but rather as having implications for future funding, it was more difficult for staff to engage in honest exploration and discern capacity building priorities.

Where possible, the ORS team engaged with local facilitators who were available who were able to speak the home languages of organizational staff and brought a nuanced understanding of cultural norms to facilitation and documentation of staff input. Conducting facilitated reviews in person also seemed to optimize the productivity of these sessions, though when staff had sufficiently reflected on data in advance and leaders were supportive, review sessions done via video conference were also successful.

Applying a "field frame" to advocacy and communications assessment can inform capacity building across a cohort of organizations.

Often, strong advocacy and communications capacity exists not just within a single organization but across multiple organizations whose goals are aligned or whose efforts are intentionally coordinated. Implementing the GPA assessment using a "field frame" may be helpful for understanding capacity across aligned organizations, collaborators, partners, or a network of organizations . For example, within GPA, there are instances where a cluster of organizations is working on an issue or toward a shared goal. In these situations, assessment may offer a good opportunity to better understand how organizations working together demonstrate comprehensive or complementary advocacy and communications capacity and where there are opportunities to strengthen capacity across the cohort.

Conclusion

Responding to the Gates Foundation's interests, the ORS Impact team developed and piloted a robust and culturally responsive advocacy and communications capacity assessment tool that included input from grantees and external stakeholders. The assessment also incorporated a facilitated review of findings with organizational staff to enhance data interpretation, ensure cultural nuances were considered and represented, and boost staff's ownership of findings and likelihood of action. Based on facilitated reviews, organization-specific data summaries were refined to incorporate staff perspectives about findings; add clarity and detail (where needed); and document the capacity building priorities and potential next steps identified by staff. We emphasize that this assessment tool is intended to support learning and inform organizational strengthening, not to evaluate organizational performance.

We hope that others will find this comprehensive advocacy and communications capacity assessment tool to be useful and valuable, and we invite descriptions of how this tool is applied in other scenarios. We believe that these descriptions will promote further learning about ways to effectively assess advocacy and communications capacity and respond to opportunities to build and strengthen organizations' capacity, specifically regarding advocacy and communications. We also invite comments and suggestions that could enhance the tool or its implementation.

Appendix A

Advocacy and Communications Capacity Assessments Reviewed by ORS Impact

GPA's aims for an advocacy and communications capacity assessment included the following:

> **Rigor,** to be achieved via inclusion of external perspectives about capacity along with organizational self-assessment
>
> **Cultural responsiveness**
>
> **Comprehensive**, including both advocacy and communications capacity dimensions

After conducting a thorough review of the 15 tools below, ORS concluded that none specifically addressed all three of GPA's aims.

- The Access Initiative. *Advocacy and Policy Change Workbook*. 2010.
- Alliance for Justice, Bolder Advocacy Initiative. *ACT! Advocacy Capacity Tool*. 2015.
- The Alliance to End Hunger. *Self-Assessment Workbook for Network Organizations (SAW).* 2014.
- Beardsley, Kipling. *Policy Advocacy Rapid Assessment Tool for CSOs*. Washington, DC: Health Policy Project, 2016.
- C-Change. *Social and Behavior Change Communication—Capacity Assessment Tool (SBCC-CAT).* 2011.
- Dalberg Global Advisors. *Draft Framework for Considering Advocacy Capacity and Effectiveness.* 2016.
- dRPC. *Capacity Assessment Tool*.
- The Dutch Consortium for International Rehabilitation and INTRAC. *Advocacy Capacity Assessment Tool (ACAT).* 2014.
- Initiatives, Inc., and PATH. *Organizational Advocacy and Capacity Assessment*. 2014.
- McKinsey & Company. *Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool.*
- PACFaH. *Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool*.
- PATH. *Policy Advocacy Capacity Assessment Tool*. 2015.
- Reisinger Whatley, Anne, Christine R. Hershey, Julia Coffman, and Andre Oliver. "Assessing Nonprofits' Communications Capacity: An Online Self-Assessment Tool," *The Foundation Review 2, no. 1*. (2010). Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.4087/FOUNDATIONREVIEW-D-09-00043
- Rothenberg, Bess. *Organizational Mapping Tool (OMT).* 2016.
- TCC Group. *What Makes an Effective Advocacy Organization? A Framework for Determining Advocacy Capacity*. 2009.

Appendix B

GPA Advocacy and Communications Capacity Assessment Tool

Staff Assessment Survey

External Stakeholder Interview Protocol

Guide for Facilitated Reflection Sessions

Staff Assessment Survey (VALIDATED)

Developed by ORS Impact, 2017

** **Note about implementation:** *This survey can be set up and implemented using an online platform such as SurveyGizmo or Survey Monkey* **

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for agreeing to participate in a pilot of an advocacy and communications capacity assessment being implemented by [name of implementing party] on behalf of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Global Policy Advocacy (GPA) team. This survey is one part of the capacity assessment process.

- The purpose of this survey is to provide your organization with a picture of where advocacy and communications capacity is strong, and what are opportunities to strengthen capacity.
- Your anonymous survey responses will be combined with the responses of others from your organization and a summary of the survey results will be shared directly with your organization. The survey results will form the basis for a facilitated discussion among staff about the organization's advocacy and communications capacity.
- Following the addition of information generated during the facilitated discussion, and a general summary of your organizations' strengths and opportunities for growth will be finalized and shared with your program officer(s) at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation so that they better understand capacity building needs.
- This survey is not an assessment of your organization's performance, nor the performance of individuals associated with your organization. BMGF program officers will not use data from this survey to determine whether to continue funding.
- The survey should take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete.
- If you have questions about this survey or the capacity review, you may contact:
- [names and email addresses of BMGF/ implementing party contact people]

For this survey, terms are defined as below.

> **Advocacy:** the act or process of supporting a cause, a campaign, or a proposal
>
> **Communications**: a strategic approach to designing and delivering messages to shape perceptions and/or strengthen support among those who can positively influence a cause, a campaign, or a proposal
>
> **Capacity**: the ability of individuals or organizations to execute actions or perform functions and to set and advance goals or objectives

SECTION 1. ADVOCACY & COMMUNICATIONS APPROACHES

Response choices for all scales in this section:

1	2	3	4	5	6
We do this poorly	**We do this moderately well**		**We do this well**		**We excel at this**

STRATEGY	
How well does your organization	**Identify and document** clear policy priorities and goals
	Identify and develop clear advocacy and communications plans (strategies, actions and tactics) to advance policy priorities and goals
	Document a plan or model that expresses the changes or results the organization believes will happen as a result of their advocacy and communications effort
	Quickly adjust (change or modify) tactics when needed
	Allocate sufficient budget and staff to engage in strong advocacy and communications efforts
	Adjust advocacy and communications resources (budget, staff) as opportunities or circumstances change
	Understand who are the key stakeholders regarding specific policy or financing issues and decisions
PARTNER ENGAGEMENT	
How well does your organization	**Work** with other organizations or influential leaders to develop a joint agenda (shared goals), strategy, or action plan
	Form or lead groups or coalitions around a particular policy or financing decision, or implementation issue
	Participate in groups or coalitions when doing so would be helpful to advancing policy and financing goals
	Identify and work with people who can effectively speak with decision makers or advocate for an issue
LEARNING	
How well does your organization	**Analyze** or interpret data about the quality or effectiveness of advocacy and communications efforts
	Regularly reflect on advocacy and communications MLE data, document lessons about what's working and what's not, then apply learnings to current / future advocacy and communications work
	Involve staff at multiple levels (senior managers as well as program staff) in learning from advocacy and communications MLE data and applying lessons.
	Share lessons from advocacy and communications MLE data with those from other organizations (for example, partners, coalitions or others working to advance policy or resource decisions or implementation.
	Generate evidence regarding the effectiveness of advocacy and communications efforts
	Regularly reflect on and apply learnings from past or current policy- and financing-related efforts
	Monitor whether a policy or financing effort had the intended impact (and whether there were any unintended consequences)

REMINDER

For this survey, terms are defined as below.

Advocacy: the act or process of supporting a cause, a campaign, or a proposal

Communications: a strategic approach to designing and delivering messages to those who can positively influence a cause, a campaign, or a proposal

Capacity: the ability of individuals or organizations to execute actions or perform functions and to set and advance goals or objectives

SECTION 2. WORK AREA-SPECIFIC ACTIONS & BEHAVIORS

Response choices for all scales in this section:

1	2	3	4	5	6	NA
We do this poorly	**We do this moderately well**		**We do this well**		**We excel at this**	**This area of work is not part of our advocacy and communica-tions strategy**

DEVELOPING POLICY	
How well does your organization	**Develop** policy proposals and legislation informed by data or research
	Incorporate policy and/or analysis of government budgets into policy proposals
	Consider and represent the needs of community members affected by policy or financing decisions when developing policy proposals
MONITORING POLICY	
How well does your organization	**Monitor** support <u>and</u> opposition to a policy proposal or financing decision
	Monitor decision makers' support or voting patterns regarding policy proposals or financing decisions
	Have a system to track the policy or political environment and identify where there are opportunities
	Track government budgets, including proposed budget commitments and actual expenditures
SUPPORTING IMPLEMENTATION	
How well does your organization	**Leverage** relationships with government administrators to ensure policy implementation promotes positive outcomes (for example, ensuring policy is adequately funded, there is sufficient capacity to implement, there are clear plans for execution)
	Leverage relationships with service providers to ensure policy implementation promotes positive outcomes (there is sufficient capacity to implement, there are clear plans for execution)
	Strive to ensure government leaders have access to technical knowledge that may be needed to support successful policy implementation (for example, ensuring those in government have necessary technical knowledge or are in contact with knowledgeable experts)

SECTION 2. WORK AREA-SPECIFIC ACTIONS & BEHAVIORS

ENGAGING CIVIL SOCIETY LEADERS	
How well does your organization	**Identify** and build relationships with civil society leaders from a range of sectors - for example, faith and cultural leaders; leaders of networks, associations or unions; business leaders; academics; those in the media
	Make use of a range of strategies to connect with civil society leaders, such as providing briefs or other educational materials; utilizing effective messengers; direct contact
	Educate civil society leaders about priority issues
ENGAGING ELECTED OFFICIALS	
How well does your organization	**Identify** and build relationships with elected officials or leaders at multiple levels of government
	Make use of a range of strategies to connect with elected officials and government leaders (for example, providing briefs or other educational materials; utilizing effective messengers; direct contact)
	Educate elected officials and government leaders about priority issues and proposed solutions, including through forums, peer exchanges or other platforms.
ENGAGING COMMUNITIES	
How well does your organization	**Listen to and build relationships** with the community members who are most directly affected by the issues to be addressed by policy or financing goals
	Educate and train affected community members about how they can effectively contribute to the advancement of policy or financing goals
	Mobilize and support affected community members to act toward a policy or resource goal (for example, speaking out at public forums)
	Engage with community members or affected populations to determine whether or not a policy or financing decision has been implemented
DEVELOPING MESSAGE	
How well does your organization	**Develop** clear, specific and topical messages that address policy or financing goals
	Use accurate and compelling data when developing messages
	Test potential communications messages with target audiences and adapt them as needed
	Use different messages for different audiences
	Ensure communications plan addresses policy and financing goal(s)
DISSEMINATING MESSAGES	
How well does your organization	**Maintain** good relationships and connections with strategically relevant media outlets
	Develop communications products that are targeted such as educational brochures, infographics
	Utilize print media, such as newspapers, journals, newsletters, in a compelling manner
	Utilize digital media, such as social media, podcasts, videos, infographics, in a compelling manner
	Utilize broadcast media, such as TV and radio, in a compelling manner
	Maintain attention with relevant audience(s) or in relevant sector(s), for example, by publishing materials, authoring articles, speaking to media or at forums or other events, etc
	Routinely monitor the messages surrounding key issues, including both opposing and supporting messages

SECTION 2. WORK AREA-SPECIFIC ACTIONS & BEHAVIORS

USING DATA TO MAKE THE CASE

How well does your organization	**Identify** what data are needed to make a compelling case to advance policy or financing goals, including where there are data gaps or data needs
	Know where to find quality data relevant to your organization's policy or financing goals
	Produce research- or data-informed products that are timely, meaning. products are available at the right time to be most influential or useful

Not every organization implements every aspect of advocacy and communications work. Please indicate which scales: (1) are **part of your organization's core work,** AND (2) are **very important to your organization's ability to advance its goals**:

- ☐ Developing Policy
- ☐ Monitoring Policy
- ☐ Supporting Implementation
- ☐ Engaging with Civil Society Leaders
- ☐ Engaging Elected Officials
- ☐ Engaging Communities
- ☐ Developing Messages
- ☐ Disseminating Messages
- ☐ Using Data to Make the Case

Section 3. ORGANIZATIONAL ASSETS — 12 items

Response choices for all scales in this section:

-	1	2	3	4
Not applicable	**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**

EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE WITHIN STAFF TO EFFECTIVELY EXECUTE ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES

My organizational team includes individuals who have sufficient training in and/or experience with advocacy work, such as those with experience doing policy interventions, those who are skillful at working with different types of stakeholders, and those who are proficient at use of data.
My organizational team includes individuals who have sufficient training in and/or experience with communications work, such as those with experience developing and disseminating messages.

FUNDING/FISCAL MANAGEMENT

My organization has unrestricted funding - that is, funding that can be used for internal operations and administration, not just project funding
My organization's budget includes dedicated funds for advocacy and communications – that is, either grant funding that supports advocacy and communications, or other funding that your organization allocates to advocacy and communications work
My organization has a stable funding situation - that is, the organization has significant long-term funding, a diverse set of funders

Section 3. ORGANIZATIONAL ASSETS — 12 items
STAFFING STABILITY AND COMMITMENT
Advocacy and communications staffing has been stable for the past 3 years
Our organization's executive leadership has been stable for the past 3 years
GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP
My organization's board regularly provides strategic guidance on policy or communications issues
My organization's board has a policy/communications committee that provides input on advocacy and communications approaches, tactics or goals
REPUTATION AND CREDIBILITY
My organization has a good reputation among community members, other advocacy organizations, and service-providers
My organization has a good reputation among decision makers, government and civil society leaders, and the media
Members of the organization's staff are contacted regularly by decision makers, government or civil society leaders, or the media as a source of information

Section 4. PERCEPTIONS ABOUT CAPACITY BUILDING

1. Have you personally participated in capacity building or professional development efforts in the areas of advocacy and/or communications in the past three years, such as training, conferences, mentoring programs, peer to peer exchange programs, trainings? If so, please provide a brief description.

2. Regarding training or professional development in the areas of advocacy or communications that <u>you personally</u> have participated in, what has been most useful to you and how?

3. In terms of advocacy and communications skills or effectiveness, where do you feel you or your organization has made the most gains in the past three years?

4. Thinking about the previous sections of the survey, in what areas do you feel your organization could most improve its advocacy and communications work?
   - What types of capacity building efforts would most help your organization improve in the areas you identified?

5. What resources are currently available to your organization that might help support or strengthen your organization's advocacy and communications capacity?

GPA ADVOCACY & COMMUNICATIONS CAPACITY REVIEW:

External Stakeholder Interview Protocol

August 30, 2017

August 30, 2017

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview, which is part of an organizational capacity review for [organization]. The capacity review is being implemented on behalf of [organization]

- The purpose of this interview is to get your perspective about [organization]'s strengths and what they could do better, and ways in which [organization]'s advocacy and communications efforts have made a positive difference.
- Information collected through the interviews will be shared with [organization] to show [organization] how your perceptions about their work align with their own self-assessment. The information you provide will not be attributed to you but because [organization] nominated you and others that we are also talking with, confidentiality can't be guaranteed.
- Summarized findings from interviews regarding multiple organizations may be shared with -[organization].
- Please do not hesitate to ask for clarification if you do not understand any of my questions.
- This interview should take about 30 minutes.
- If you have questions about this survey or the capacity review, you may contact: [name(s) of contact people]

Questions

1. When and how did [organization] first come to your attention?

2. What is the nature of your relationship?

3. When were you last aware of advocacy and/or communications work done by [organization]? For example, you may know about the organization's work to raise awareness about certain issues, deliver media messages, make the case for a policy or financing solution; or, implement a campaign. [*Interviewer: you may prompt the stakeholder to share their awareness of an organization's work based on your knowledge of the organization's advocacy and communications efforts and focus, including the types of issues the organization works on, the advocacy and communications approaches they employ, and the policy or resources-related goals of their advocacy and communications.*]
    a. What role did [organization] play in that effort? [response scale: [org] had a small role in this work; [org] had a role and worked with others; [org] had a significant role; [org] led this effort]

4. How much of a positive difference did [org] make to the effort you just described? [Response scale: none; a little; a moderate difference; an extreme difference; don't know]
    a. Please describe how [organization's] advocacy and communications efforts made a positive difference - for example [*interviewer: you may select from the following examples based on your knowledge of the organization's work and goals*]: how the organization's work contributed to: greater issue visibility, improved issue framing, increased public support, stronger support from decision makers, strengthened alliances, or specific policy or resource decisions. [*Interviewer: ask interviewee to provide specific examples*]

5. Thinking about [org]'s work to advance policy and resource goals, what are they especially good at? [*Interviewer: you may reference the organization's specific policy and resource goals as examples, if they are known.*]

6. What could [org] do better?

7. Thinking again about [organization's] advocacy and communications work that you're most familiar with [identified via Q 3], I'm going to ask you to rate [organization] on 8 different skills using a 4-point scale. Based on your perceptions how well did [org] do at each of these things? Scale: 1=the organization doesn't do this; 2= the organization does not do this well; 3=the organization does moderately well; 4=the organization does this very well; 0=don't know or not applicable
    a. Adjusting strategy in response to changes in the policy and political environment
    b. Working in partnerships and/or coalitions with other organizations or leaders
    c. Producing policy OR funding proposals OR legislation (if needed, clarify which of these the organization does or doesn't do)
    d. Engaging with members of the community that directly benefit from policy or resource solutions
    e. Getting the attention of elected officials and government leaders
    f. Getting the attention of civil society leaders or aligning with civil society leaders to be champions or spokespeople for policy solutions
    g. Developing and disseminating strong messages and communications to advance policy and resource goals
    h. Using data and evidence to develop a convincing case, argument, or solution
    i. Do you want to comment on any of your ratings?

8. On a scale of 0 to 10, how likely would you be to recommend [organization] as a strong actor to advance policy or resource goals? [response scale: 0 (not likely at all) – 10 (extremely likely)]

GUIDE FOR
Facilitated Reflection Sessions

Developed by ORS Impact, 2017

Assumptions to Help Guide Facilitators

- The facilitated reflection is expected to follow data collection, analysis and an initial summary of organizational staff assessment data (and external stakeholder data, if applicable).
- Based on learnings from the pilot, the most productive facilitated reflections are likely to be a 3 to 4-hour in-person session with organizational staff. Ideally, the reflection will happen on-site but in certain cases, reflection may be implemented as a 2-3 hour webinar.
- Facilitators should be familiar with: (1) the structure of the staff assessment survey, i.e., the sections and scales, (2) external stakeholder interview protocol (if applicable), (3) the data summary template that presents data to grantees.
- In advance of the reflective session, organizational contact people and facilitators will have received a summary of the data summary. The summary lays out organizational strengths, and areas that may be opportunities for growth based on the data and findings. Organizational contacts will be asked to share the data summary with those who will participate in the reflective session, and to ensure that all staff have reviewed the data summary before the reflective session.
- The intent of the facilitated reflection is to engage staff who completed the self-assessment survey, including organizational leaders and those directly involved in advocacy and communications efforts. Of course, reflection participants may not have completed a survey, nor be familiar with the capacity assessment. Thus, facilitators should be prepared to explain the capacity assessment approach and ensure that the purpose of the assessment and of the facilitated reflection are clear to all.
- Facilitators should be prepared to guide a discussion about advocacy and communications strengths and areas for growth, and help participants reach insights about what the data indicate. Facilitators may also help organizations generate ideas about how to address capacity gaps using a participatory, non-judgmental, and positive approach.
- Facilitators will prepare a final capacity summary, incorporating information added during the facilitated reflection session, which is to be shared with BMGF program officers.
- Facilitators should take every opportunity to make participants feel comfortable and gain participant trust by avoiding an "audit" approach. Remind participants that the purpose is to generate a picture of capacity and learnings, and that opinions may vary – there are no right or wrong answers.
- If there are situations where having advocacy and communications staff meet alongside executive staff is not comfortable, it is possible that the facilitator could try having the team break into small groups, or meet separately with advocacy and communications staff and the executive staff to develop the capacity summary for POs.
- Facilitators should feel free to ask for guidance and support; the ORS team will offer support via regular communications or as needed check-ins and can be available as needed.

Overview of Reflective Session Topic Areas and Agenda

INTRODUCTIONS AND OVERVIEW OF FACILITATED REFLECTION — TALKING POINTS FOR FACILITATORS *(30 mins)*

- **Facilitator introduction.** Facilitator to introduce him/herself.
- **Review terms**. For this reflection session, we are using the terms advocacy, communications and capacity. Here is what we mean by those terms:
  - ***Advocacy*** -The act or process of supporting a cause, a campaign or a proposal.
  - ***Communications*** - A strategic approach to designing and delivering messages to those who can positively influence a cause, a campaign or a proposal (for this capacity review, we are not specifically talking about communications intended for organizational marketing or branding or fundraising)
  - ***Capacity*** - The ability of individuals or organizations to perform functions, and set and achieve objectives.
- **Purpose of reflection session**. Facilitator to remind participants about the purpose for this session and the capacity review.
  - Opportunity to review, ask questions, and discuss results from the organizational self-assessment (completed by members of the staff) and external stakeholder interviews
  - Opportunity to understand and discuss areas where perspectives of staff and external stakeholders are similar, and where they are different
  - Identify and reflect on organizational strengths or areas for growth that emerge from data, and priorities for strengthening advocacy and communications capacity at your organization
  - Create a picture of this organization's advocacy & communications capacity – strengths and areas for growth - that everyone agrees on
  - Create a capacity summary to be shared with your program officer(s) at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.
    - BMGF is thinking about ways to support organizational capacity building to help ensure the strongest possible advocacy and communications and the best chance of advancing policy and resource goals. The capacity summary can help to inform conversations with BMGF regarding next steps.
    - The Gates Foundation will not use the capacity summary to determine future funding for your organization.
    - Organizations may share their results and the capacity summary with others at their discretion.
- **Timeframe.** We will be meeting until XX o'clock.
- **Participant introductions**. Each staff person introduces with name, title, role.
- **Questions?**
- **Guidance for discussion.** There are no right or wrong answers; everyone is welcome to participate in the discussion.

DISCUSSION *(75 mins)*

- **Review summary of data and findings (see template)**. Confirm that everyone has seen the summary of data and findings. If someone has not seen the data summary, facilitators should provide a copy and allow the staff a few minutes to read and review.
- **Reflect on data and findings**. Guiding questions for discussion:
  - To what extent is there agreement across your organization about strengths and areas for growth? If there are differences: why do you think there might be differences in staffs' perceptions? What can be learned from the different perceptions of staff?
  - In what ways did external stakeholders affirm organizational staffs' perceptions about your organization's advocacy and communications work?
  - In what ways did external stakeholders' perceptions of your work differ from the self-assessment? If there are differences: why do you think there might be differences in staffs' and stakeholders' perceptions? What can be learned from the different perceptions of staff and stakeholders?
  - What surprised you about the stakeholder or self-assessment data and findings?
  - What useful information did the stakeholder input provide? What information was not useful?
  - Is there any area of advocacy and communications work that you think the organization does well or could do better that didn't surface in the data or findings?
  - Reflect on capacity building needs and priorities.

Guiding questions:

- Of the areas of advocacy and communications work that staff indicate are most important to advancing your goals, where are you strong? Where could you be stronger?
- In what areas do you feel it is necessary to build capacity to be more effective in advancing your advocacy and communications goals?

PREPARING THE CAPACITY SUMMARY *(60 mins)*

- **Identify highlights.** Based on the team's review and discussion, what is it most important to highlight and share with BMGF in a capacity summary? What are the organization's clearest strengths? What are the organizations clearest areas to grow? What advocacy and communications capacities can help your organization successfully advance BMGF's policy and resource goals?
- **Identify potential capacity supports**. What kinds of capacity building supports could most enhance your organization's capacity, for example: training, mentorship, etc.?

FEEDBACK ON THE DATA SUMMARY AND FACILITATED SESSION *(25 mins)*

- Gather staff input.
  - Was the data summary you received (self-assessment and external stakeholder data) easy to understand? [1 = not at all easy to understand to 5 = very easy to understand]
  - If score is low, ask: what was not easy to understand?
  - Did the data summary provide relevant information? [1 = not at all relevant to 5 = very relevant]
  - What is needed to improve the data summary?
  - Was this reflection session worthwhile? [1 = not at all worthwhile to 5 = very worthwhile]
  - What was useful? What didn't work well?
  - What should be changed?
  - Anything else you would like to share about the capacity review?

GUIDELINES FOR FACILITATORS REGARDING DOCUMENTATION OF THE SESSION

- Prepare brief (3-4 page) summary of the reflective session.
  - Document the name of the organization and the date of the facilitated session
  - Document the names, titles, and roles of participant
  - Document observations about:
    - Whether/ to what extent all participants had reviewed the capacity summary in advance.
    - Whether/ to what extent all participants shared their views and spoke up and whether/to what extent participants were comfortable sharing their views and speaking up. Did everyone have the opportunity to speak? Did anyone dominate conversation?
    - Whether there was a spirit of curiosity / intent to improve? Was there fear or concern expressed?
  - Document any notable areas of strong agreement or disagreement among participants.
  - Document general observations about the session, the quality and productiveness of the discussion and how well the facilitation worked.

Prepare capacity summary to be shared with BMGF.

  - Document clear strengths and gaps that emerged via discussion.
  - Reflect what participants sought to include.