

## Eight Options for Capacity Building

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*We all know the reasons **why** funders and nonprofit networks offer capacity-building assistance – to leverage dollars to strengthen organizations and improve programmatic success. But **what** are the types of capacity-building resources that you can offer cohorts of nonprofits, and **how** do you decide?*

*The assistance you choose to provide will depend on your goals and available resources, and will be influenced by the organizational development needs of your grantees.*

*Convening and training tend to cost less than one-on-one coaching and consulting, while peer exchanges offer more bang-for-the-buck. Creating a blended solution of capacity building options that reinforce one another tends to be most effective.*

*When mixing and matching services, focus on the crucial leadership and adaptive capacities. Consulting and coaching strengthen leadership capacity, while training and tools are best for improving technical capacity.*

### Tools and Resources

You can provide tools – such as board self-assessment instruments, personnel policy manual templates, and financial management software – to participating organizations. You may also want to give them publications related to nonprofit management and governance. In addition, you could refer them to other resources that can help them address organizational challenges and opportunities, such as consultants, useful websites, and other nonprofits that have faced similar challenges.

### Online Social Networks

The integration of social networking into both professional and personal communication spheres can be leveraged to form a cohesive and active network for your partners. A site dedicated to your program can vary in use from simple resource-sharing and cataloguing to a dynamic forum for dialogue and peer interaction. External experts, consultants, and funder representatives, where appropriate, can be included to share insights, join conversations, and provide thought-provoking content in real-time. Social networks can provide an effective complement to a group that meets periodically in person, to support the continuity of their interaction, capture timely updates, and deepen engagement. The network can also eliminate email overload and add uniformity to your messaging by streamlining your communications for calendars, contact information, logistical updates, documents, and photos within a single forum.

## Education and Training

Training and educational opportunities help individual employees, trustees, and volunteers develop skills to better manage and support their organization. Offerings can range from brief, one-time seminars to regularly scheduled trainings and webinars to year-long university-based courses on such topics as strategic planning, board development, or program evaluation. Whatever the setting, adults learn best when there is a clear agenda with specific goals, and when there is an opportunity to apply new skills and concepts to real-life situations. It is critical that key change agents receive the training and are accountable for implementing what they learned.

## Peer Exchange

Peer exchanges – including round tables, case-study groups, and learning circles – are based on the premise that participants can be both teachers *and* learners. To be most successful, peer exchanges need a skilled facilitator, a safe environment in which a consistent array of participants can express and modify their beliefs, a clear set of learning objectives, and a balance of structure and flexibility. Peer exchanges can lessen participant isolation, increase confidence, and heighten awareness of diverse views and alternative situations.

## Convening

You can deepen the impact of your initiative by convening the cohort of grantees regularly. Conferences that strategically integrate instructional learning with peer interaction can be used to develop a learning community

through customized trainings and clinics, peer exchange, and informal networking. These forums can help to deepen partner engagement, while facilitating discussions about issues in the field or community and support joint actions related to funding, policy advocacy, and programs.

## Coaching

You may want to offer one-on-one coaching to nonprofit executives. In this relationship, the coach offers new ideas and perspectives, asks challenging questions, and helps the client to process information and adapt behavior.

## Consulting

Consulting is a broad term that describes a wide array of relationships between a nonprofit client and a professional advisor, whether a private consultant or a nonprofit management support organization. Roles vary depending on the consultant's style and background, the needs of the client, and the type of project. In some cases, a consultant acts as a directive expert, conveying information and prescribing solutions related to programs, organizational development, or specialized areas, such as accounting or fundraising. In other situations, a consultant serves as a facilitator, guiding a process and helping the client to reflect on options and make decisions.

## Grants

As part of an initiative, a funder can provide grants to support specific capacity-building efforts, programs, general operations, or endowment.