

3.4.0

SERIES 3

Building Resilience



CAPACITY ASSESSMENT

Contents of Set

3.4.0: Guide

3.4.1: Activity

Most cities do not have all the climate information and planning resources they would like to have. Consequently, they must determine what knowledge, skills, and abilities they and their citizens do have and how those can contribute in a meaningful way to resilience goals. A capacity assessment is an evaluation of the human resources that are available locally, and which critical skills may need to be filled by outside experts or consultants. Outside experts can be costly. By effectively using local citizens and institutions whenever possible you can save significant funding while simultaneously generating ongoing public education and engagement in the city resilience process and increased institutional buy-in into the project goals and efforts. Additionally, relying on local resources may help you discover local conditions and/or social priorities that outside experts would not be aware of.

IN THIS SET YOU WILL:

- ✓ Be introduced to capacity assessments and the role they play in prioritizing resilience interventions and planning project implementation;
- ✓ Identify core capacities your city will need to deliver climate intervention projects;
- ✓ Discuss whether these skills might be available locally, and if so where that capacity is located;
- ✓ Develop a rating system to indicate the depth of that capacity; and
- ✓ Develop an initial capacity assessment matrix for one of your proposed resilience projects.

Overview

Capacity assessments can help you determine what skills, knowledge, and experience local individuals and organizations can contribute to specific resilience efforts and projects in your city. Ideally, a capacity assessment will be implemented for each adaptation or resilience action you plan to implement. In some cases, the capacity and information needed for the project will be clear and the capacity assessment will be very brief, possibly as simple as a discussion among the climate working group members. In other cases, it may require a more formal effort, in which project goals are systematically reviewed, the capacities and information needed to achieve those goals compiled, and stakeholder meetings held to identify local sources of capacity and information. During this assessment process, skills and knowledge that are not available locally will also be identified.

Capacity assessments are most useful and effective when they are conducted with specific project goals in mind and particular skills and knowledge can be identified. However, a capacity assessment for a specific project will be useful for other projects as well. For example, an assessment of capacity for a mangrove restoration project may result in a matrix of local skills and abilities that can be saved and shared with other project teams. This way, another teams

working to restore or enhance city parks, for instance, will already know whether there are local ecologists familiar with both the local environment and city resilience efforts. Ultimately, your climate working group should have a large and detailed (and constantly growing!) understanding of all the local capacities you have used for planning or implementing individual projects as part of your broader resilience plan.

Capacity assessments are often conducted in conjunction with technical feasibility studies. A technical feasibility study aims to answer the question “can this be done?” A capacity assessment seeks to determine who can do it, either locally or from other institutions outside the city. However, capacity assessment should not be limited to just the technical project skills and needs identified through a feasibility study, but instead should be conducted more broadly to assess the full range of skills that a community can bring to solving complex climate issues.

It is important that the team of people conducting the capacity assessment be both knowledgeable about the city resilience efforts and have broad community representation. Having diverse team members with various community backgrounds and expertise will help you identify a broader range of local capacity, and will help ensure that your team addresses the considerations and perspectives of vulnerable

populations. For example, an assessment team that does not include women, in a community where women are the primary household managers, may fail to identify that these women have a detailed understanding of local well water levels. For studies that will need groundwater level information, such as water supply studies, salinization studies, or flood control studies, this information could be critical, and not available elsewhere. It is also essential that the assessment team include members who are knowledgeable about the city resilience efforts so that the appropriate skills and knowledge are identified.

Capacity assessment can be undertaken at a number of points in a project:

- As resilience actions are developed and prioritized, capacity assessments can help evaluate whether you can meet the project's goals using local resources. The ability to use local capacity, and thereby keep costs down, may play a role in how you prioritize your resilience options.
- Once you have selected resilience actions for implementation, surveying local capacity in the planning process will save time and energy by maximizing the use of local talent and minimizing outside consultation.
- Once a project has been developed and is ready

for implementation, a capacity assessment that was conducted during the prioritization or planning phases should be re-evaluated in light of modified goals or project requirements. Alternatively, if a capacity assessment was not conducted during earlier phases, one should be undertaken before implementation is begun.

Your team may be interested in identifying a whole range of capacities, including local skills in project planning, monitoring, and integration, as well as specific scientific and community knowledge. Because few cities have staff experienced with implementing projects specifically for climate resiliency, it will be necessary to seek these skills in departments and organizations that have achieved success in other areas. For example, transportation departments often have experience in projects that require large logistical planning and coordination across a city and in a variety of communities. Transportation agencies, therefore, may be a source of strong project planning skills. Likewise, a local community health NGO may have experience building awareness on public health issues, and would therefore be a good source for community education or awareness campaign skills.

There are a number of ways you can record and evaluate the capacities within your community. One simple method is to create a Project Capacity Matrix on paper or in a computer

spreadsheet. In the left-hand column you list the skills and knowledge areas necessary to plan and implement the project. Across the top, you list local organizations and departments. The capacity of each department, organization, or individual will be scored using a regular rating system, such as the one below:

- 0 Unknown capacity:** The team is unaware of the department/organization's current skills or knowledge in this area, and therefore needs more information.
- 1 No evidence of relevant capacity:** The team has determined that this department/organization does not have relevant skills or knowledge in this particular area.
- 2 Anecdotal evidence of capacity:** The team has reason to believe that this department/organization has relevant skills or knowledge, and therefore needs more information to determine the extent.
- 3 Partially developed capacity:** The team identifies some relevant experience that has recently been developed or is in the process of being developed. The team may therefore approach this department/organization, however keeping in mind that additional expertise is likely to be necessary.

4 Widespread, but not comprehensive, evidence of capacity: The team sees this department/organization as a strong, if not expert, source of skills or knowledge. The team agrees it can rely upon this organization/department for a great deal of the project's capacity needs, with the chance that external consultation may still be required.

5 Fully developed capacity: The team has identified full or expert capacity in this department/organization and may rely upon it for all relevant skills and knowledge. No outside consultation will be required.

To ensure consistency, the same rating system must be used for all aspects of the assessment. Your assessment team must define the basis for each rating level so that there is reliable evaluation of capacities. For example, a rating of four (4) from the example above might be defined as a general agreement and understanding among your assessment team that the water department is capable of long term budgeting because they have recently completed a city works project that required that skill, but the team believes that skill to be relatively new to the department, one that has not been used regularly with well known success. Each city should develop its own system—other examples include: 1-10 ratings, High-Medium-Low scales, or more simplified Yes

or No categorization. Because the ratings themselves may be subjective, based solely on the available knowledge of the assessment team, it is important to have a diverse team and be willing to make adjustments to the ratings as more information becomes available.

When creating your project matrix, it is useful to develop a list of skills that all or most projects will need. Those could include multi-year budgeting experience, logistical planning, and project monitoring and evaluation, among others. The skills that every project needs should form the basis of your assessment matrix and will appear in each assessment. Other skills and knowledge may be needed based on specific project requirements, and will therefore change from assessment to assessment. Many of the specific knowledge and technical skills a particular project may need will be identified through a technical feasibility study and should be incorporated into your assessment matrix.

In addition, the matrix should list as many departments and organizations as possible. While assessment team members might come to the table with specific departments or organizations already in mind, it is critical to consider a large range of possible sources, since skills often exist in unexpected places.

To Think About

Capacity assessments can be challenging because of the tendency for departments, organizations, and institutions to work independently and therefore unintentionally restrict outside knowledge of their internal capabilities. Valuable skills and knowledge can remain inaccessible because the assessment team is simply unaware of potential resources. As individuals and organizations are identified as partners, they should be consulted for their knowledge about other potential contributors, thereby extending the reach of the assessment process and increasing the buy-in of new partners. It is important to acknowledge that it will be nearly impossible to assess the full range of skills available within a community for resilience efforts, so the assessment should be seen as an ongoing process that can be added to as the project develops.

There is also a risk that the assessment process itself will become the goal rather than a means of achieving a larger goal. The identification of individuals with necessary skills is only a step in the planning and implementation process and should be conducted within a limited timeframe to complement other ongoing activities.

Finally, and perhaps most challengingly, assessing the local availability of a certain set of skills obviously does not guarantee that those organizations or people will participate in your planning and implementation efforts. This can leave inconvenient gaps that will still need to be filled by other means. If you have identified capacities that you hope to use in your projects, begin discussions early with the relevant departments or organizations.

While many aspects of resilience planning will capitalize on skills already present in your community, climate change also raises an entirely new set of challenges due to the highly uncertain nature of impacts. Existing departments or organizations may be more comfortable planning traditional projects, such as construction of flood infrastructure, that assume a predictable, stable climate. Projects managers should take this into consideration when approaching departments for their skills or knowledge.

A Note on Technical Feasibility Assessments

Technical feasibility assessments generally go hand-in-hand with Capacity Assessments. Technical Feasibility Assessments are designed to answer “can it be done?” and if so, “what skills will we need to do it?”

Technical feasibility assessments are not just for highly technical or ‘hard’ projects (e.g. infrastructure solutions), but are valuable for any project, including those based on softer approaches such as capacity building, community action, and policy development. A technical feasibility assessment should also address the practicality of the proposed project by addressing potential constraints such as available timeframe, risks to implementation, and governance (such as regulations). The type of assessment you will need will be highly dependent on the type of project you are proposing. We do not provide a framework for technical feasibility assessments as part of Series 3, but encourage groups to look for local or regional feasibility assessment resources and to include this as part of your evaluation and ranking of resilience options.

It should also be noted that technical feasibility analyses do not evaluate ‘should it be done’. This is an important question, and is better answered through other approaches such as cost-benefit, vulnerability analysis, stakeholder consultations, environmental and social assessments, and multi-criteria analysis. Several of these other approaches are addressed in Series 2 and Series 3 Sets. The Participatory Cost Benefit Assessment approach, provided in Set 3.6, may be particularly helpful in answering ‘should it be done’.