

Capacity Assessments:

Stepwise Planning for Multisector Community Coalitions and Partnerships



Multisector community coalitions and partnerships addressing social determinants of health (SDOH) to improve health equity and chronic disease often operate in dynamic, complex environments and must adapt and improve over time. This resource is a starting point for learning how to assess your coalition's, partnership's, or organization's capacity.¹ We encourage you to use it to identify organizational strengths and opportunities to address SDOH and plan for future work.

What are capacity assessments, and why are they important for SDOH initiatives?

A capacity assessment is a process that sheds light on the state of your coalition's work, highlights gaps and opportunities to address SDOH, and helps you begin planning for future work. Reflecting on the following questions with your coalition partners can promote collaboration and ensure a shared understanding of the state of your work, which can help build consensus as you plan for the future.

- What are we doing well?
- What are our strengths/assets?
- What are our gaps/areas for improvement?

Conducting capacity assessments regularly can:

- Help you respond to emerging opportunities, challenges, and needs
- Keep you on track with your mission
- Bring organization staff and partners together to promote shared understanding and alignment
- Support the sustainability of your work to achieve long-term success and improve health and health equity in your community

How do you conduct a capacity assessment?

The following five steps will guide you through conducting a capacity assessment. You can use these steps to engage coalition members, partners, staff, and volunteers in a conversation about strengths, challenges, and goals to promote alignment across the organization.

¹ This resource accompanies a Getting Further Faster (GFF) Community of Practice peer-learning event titled "Capacity Assessment: Understanding Where We Are to Get to Where We Want to Go." The event [recording](#), [slides](#), and other resources are available in the [GFF Resource Library](#).

Step 1. Determine what you want to assess.

Decide if you want to conduct a comprehensive self-assessment of several aspects of your work or focus on one high-priority domain. See the Sustainability Overview (Section II) of

[Understanding and Planning for Sustainability: A Guide for Multi-Sector Community Partnerships Working to Address Social Determinants of Health](#) for seven sustainability domains that might be relevant to your organization or coalition.



Tip

Keep in mind what is most important to your work at the time of the assessment, as your priorities might change over time.

Step 2. Determine who will be involved in the assessment. Include diverse representatives from the coalition or partnership in the assessment, especially those who have direct experience with the domain, process, or program you are assessing. Amplifying diverse voices can give you a better understanding of your coalition’s work and improve future planning.

Step 3. Develop a strategy for conducting the assessment. Select a tool to conduct the assessment or develop your own. The box on page 3 lists existing tools for conducting comprehensive assessments and for gauging specific needs. Consider adapting the questions in these tools so they are relevant to your coalition.

Step 4. Create a plan to facilitate the assessment. Plan a facilitation strategy that allows all parties to share their experiences, creates a safe space, and promotes discussion and shared decision making. Consider the following questions:

- How will you encourage partners to share diverse perspectives from their experiences and ensure all perspectives are considered equally?
- How will you incorporate the perspectives of partners who cannot attend a meeting?
- How will you ensure that all parties stay focused on the issues at hand?
- How will you build in time for collaborative sensemaking and group reflection?

Keep in mind the spectrum of [community engagement to ownership](#) as you think through how your coalition can authentically partner with community members and center their voices in decision making.² The spectrum provides a tool to assess and improve community engagement to advance community-driven solutions and tips for vital power-sharing and power-building.

Step 5. Define short-term goals and action steps based on your results. Discuss the information you learned from the assessment and plan your next steps for expanding your capacity. Consider the following questions to support equitable decision making:

- How will you share assessment results with coalition members and the community?

Asset mapping

Asset mapping can help you identify the strengths and assets that already exist in your community or environment. Resources related to asset mapping include the following:

- [Section 1: Asset Mapping—UCLA Center for Health Policy Research](#)
- [Participatory Asset Mapping: A Community Research Lab Toolkit](#)

² Gonzalez, R. “The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership.” *Facilitating Power*, 2019.

- How will you show that you value all partners' voices when deciding what to do with the results of the assessment?
- How will you engage partners and the community in next steps?

Action planning will involve setting small, attainable steps for your journey. Assign roles and responsibilities to execute the action steps based on your assessment results. Set the expectations for group members up front to promote accountability and make progress toward your goals. Regularly monitor your progress to help sustain momentum and adjust course, based on your results.

Conduct regular assessments over time. The cadence will depend on your goals and what works best for your coalition.

Capacity Assessment Tools

Comprehensive coalition assessments

- [Diagnosing the Health of your Coalition](#)
- [Group Assessment for Aligning Systems for People](#)

Partnership assessments

- [Partnership Assessment Tool for Health](#)
- [Assessing Strategic Partnership: The Partnership Assessment Tool](#)

Equity assessments

- [Pathways to Population Health Equity Compass: A Guide for Public Health Change Agents](#)
- [Racial Equity Toolkit: An Opportunity to Operationalize Equity](#)
- [An Equity Lens Tool for Health Departments](#) (COVID-19 example)

Policy assessment

- [Addressing Social Determinants of Health Through Policy: A Planning Guide for Multi-Sector Community Partnerships](#) and [Policy Planning Template](#)

Sustainability assessment

- [Understanding and Planning for Sustainability: A Guide for Multi-Sector Community Partnerships Working to Address Social Determinants of Health](#) and [Sustainability Planning Template](#)

Evaluation assessment

- [Measurement and Evaluation Needs Inventory](#)

Mathematica developed this resource for the [SDOH-Getting Further Faster \(GFF\) Initiative](#), a partnership between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (NCCDPHP), National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), and Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO). This resource is part of the GFF Community of Practice that Mathematica facilitates to support multisector coalitions and partnerships addressing five SDOH domains linked to chronic diseases: built environment, community-clinical linkages, food and nutrition security, social connectedness, and tobacco-free policies. To promote collaboration and share lessons learned, NACCHO and ASTHO made this resource available to any coalition or partnership seeking to transform its community by addressing SDOH. Nazihah Siddiqui, Jennifer Dickey, Eleane Lema, and Talia Parker authored this document.