

# The Advocacy Capacity Review Guide

*A facilitated process for assessing organizational capacities to  
advocate for family planning and reproductive health*

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Developed by the Aspen Planning and Evaluation Program and Rhonda Schlangen as part of an evaluation of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation's strategy to support local advocacy in Sub-Saharan Africa.

## Introduction

The Advocacy Capacity Review (ACR) is a facilitated process to identify local civil society organizations' family planning and reproductive health (FPRH)<sup>1</sup> advocacy strengths and challenges, and identify priorities for building more robust practices.

The ACR was developed by the Aspen Institute's Aspen Planning and Evaluation Program (APEP)<sup>2</sup> to provide a critical set of data for the evaluation of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation International Reproductive Health (IRH) strategy to support local advocacy in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The ACR is designed for use with individual organizations or with coalitions organized for the purpose of advancing FPRH advocacy. It incorporates specific opportunities for local civil society organizations (CSOs) to use this process to identify concrete priorities, strategies, and resources to address their own capacity development. In the context of the Hewlett Foundation evaluation, a facilitator from the APEP evaluation team supports participants' reflection on current practices and capacities. The process uses a survey tool covering four categories of organizational advocacy capacity. The components of the ACR survey focus on specific organizational capacities to support and conduct advocacy. These include a discrete set of related organizational effectiveness capacities as well as advocacy strategies and tactics. The ACR also encourages CSOs to identify additional capacities that their organizations need to effectively use advocacy as a core strategy.

This document is a comprehensive guide to the ACR.<sup>3</sup> It includes information about the role of the ACR in the evaluation of the Hewlett Foundation's advocacy strategy and complete instructions to implement the ACR process. The ACR was piloted in 2017 and further refined based on learning from this experience. (Please see [Annex C](#) for a summary of research informing the ACR's design.)

APEP and the Hewlett Foundation encourage use and adaptation of the ACR by others with proper acknowledgment of the Foundation, APEP, and Rhonda Schlangen. To support our collective learning about processes to review and support advocacy capacity, please let us know about your experience using the ACR. (Contact: rhondaschlangen@gmail.com)

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<sup>1</sup> We are using the term *FPRH* in line with the Hewlett Foundation's practices, but recognize that different organizations use different acronyms to reflect their particular frames and approaches.

<sup>2</sup> The evaluation team comprises David Devlin-Foltz, lead (APEP); Susanna Dilliplane (APEP); and consultants Rhonda Schlangen, Coumba Touré, and Julie Tumbo. Rhonda Schlangen led the design of the ACR.

<sup>3</sup> The guide's cover was designed using a background vector created by kjpgarqeter at Freepik.com.

## Background: The ACR's Role in Evaluating the Foundation's Strategy

In 2016, the Hewlett Foundation launched a [new grant-making strategy](#) to support local FPRH advocacy in Sub-Saharan Africa. The strategy's goal: a vibrant local CSO sector in sub-Saharan Africa that can capably and positively influence the family planning and reproductive health policies and funding decisions of their own national governments and of international donors.

The Foundation views a robust civil society sector with the capacity to influence FPRH policies and funding decisions as a structural change needed to have enduring impact on FPRH outcomes. The Foundation's approach focuses on helping CSOs develop the capacities they need to be sustainable, effective advocacy organizations—and giving them power over the process of strengthening their capacity and shaping their advocacy work. The Foundation supports CSOs with financial and technical assistance via grantees that are primarily based in the United States or Europe, often called international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). These INGOs serve as intermediaries responsible for providing capacity support—and in most cases sub-grants—to local advocacy CSOs. The portfolio also includes the Advocacy Accelerator, a Nairobi-based in-person and online platform that aims to strengthen advocacy capacity and support knowledge exchange among CSOs and other stakeholders working on health and development in Africa.

The strategy is grounded in a set of five principles (see box), bringing a strong emphasis on shifting decision-making power and resources towards local CSOs and contributing towards their long-term organizational effectiveness and sustainability.

One of the Hewlett Foundation's central learning questions is the extent to which—and for whom—there is evidence of strengthened CSO capacity. The Foundation seeks to understand the ways in which practices that align with the strategy principles contribute to strengthened capacity, as well as what practices do *not* help strengthen capacity and the reasons why. The evaluation also aims to help identify other factors that enable or inhibit the capacity strengthening process.

The ACR serves as an important source of data to help address these learning priorities. It is designed to provide information about:


- The state of CSOs' advocacy capacity and related capacity strengthening priorities;
- The resources, information, tools, and connections—including from Hewlett grantees and other sources—that CSOs can access and apply to their advocacy practices;
- The potential role of key strategy elements (e.g., long-term partnerships between Hewlett grantees and their CSO partners, technical assistance and access to resources from grantees, feedback loops and power sharing among CSOs and grantees) in supporting capacity strengthening; and
- The extent to which CSOs' advocacy capacity changes during the course of their collaboration with Hewlett grantees.

### Five Principles Underlying the Hewlett Foundation's Strategy

1. Support local advocacy while seeking opportunities to connect these to global advocacy efforts.
2. Strengthen and provide more hands-on and sustained technical assistance tailored to each organization.
3. Support longer-term advocacy partnerships that strengthen and support local advocacy capacity.
4. Encourage mutual accountability among all parties: funders, intermediaries, and local partners.
5. Measure progress, document, adapt, and share what is learned.

## Overview of the ACR Process

At the heart of the ACR process is a **facilitated in-person discussion** with CSO staff. This discussion covers three key components:



### Organization context and timeline

A brief overview of the organization's development ensures that the facilitator has a basic understanding of the organization or coalition and its involvement in advocacy, and can tune in to critical details during the subsequent steps of the ACR process. The facilitator's sound understanding of the organization, its context, and timeline is intended to support a more useful, accurate, and efficient ACR process. For some organizations, particularly those with staff who may not be familiar with the institutional history, participating in developing a timeline can also be an enriching process.

### Review of advocacy and organizational capacity

The review of capacity components is a systematic process to identify and discuss strengths and weaknesses of the organization's advocacy capacities and enabling organizational conditions. To guide the process, sixteen components of individual organizational advocacy capacity or twenty-one components of coalition capacity are organized in a survey tool, with ratings and descriptions of related capacity levels. These components are summarized on the next page. Full definitions of each component are provided in the survey tool (see [Annex A](#)). The detailed facilitated discussion of organizations' practices and related capacities, supporting factors and barriers, and self-selected ratings supports the organization's deeper understanding of its advocacy capacities and priorities.





### Capacity strengthening priorities and plans

Based on the discussion during development of the timeline and completion of the survey, the participating organization will identify and record both its capacity strengthening priorities and potential sources for support to address those priorities. This overview is focused on the organization or coalition. It is broadly oriented to a wide range of potential internal and external resources, and expertise that could support the organizations' efforts to strengthen its practices. It is not exclusively oriented to potential external support from the Hewlett grantee.

Prior to this facilitated discussion, a **preparation phase** helps lay the groundwork for a productive process. The facilitator should brief the CSO on the purpose and process of the ACR, and share the ACR worksheet (a summary version of this guide) so that the CSO can review it ahead of the discussion. It is also helpful for the CSO to share supporting documents that will help the facilitator understand the organization's background and history. This preparation phase allows for the facilitator to answer any questions about the process, tools, or which staff members should participate in the facilitated discussion.

A **reporting and follow-up phase** comes after the facilitated discussion. The facilitator drafts a summary report and sends it to the CSO for review and comment. In the context of the Hewlett Foundation evaluation, the intention is for the CSO to share the finalized report with its Hewlett grantee partner to help inform the specific capacity strengthening support that the CSO receives from that grantee.

## Overview of the ACR Survey Tool: Advocacy and Organizational Categories, Outcomes, and Capacity Components

Category	Outcome	Capacity Components
 Advocacy strategy and implementation	Organizations apply commitment, skills, and organizational resources to develop and advance short- and long-term strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Strategy formulation</li> <li>▪ Advocacy planning</li> <li>▪ Learning and evaluation</li> <li>▪ Adaptation</li> <li>▪ Coalition planning*</li> <li>▪ Coalition coordination*</li> </ul>
 Tactical skills	Organizations have expertise or access to support in order to develop and implement appropriate advocacy tactics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Advocacy tactic selection</li> <li>▪ Skills related to core advocacy tactics</li> </ul>
 Commitment	Organizations initiate and maintain continuous commitment to FPRH issues and engagement with sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mission alignment with FPRH and advocacy</li> <li>▪ Organizational values</li> <li>▪ Sector engagement</li> <li>▪ Constituent connections</li> <li>▪ Coalition organization*</li> <li>▪ Coalition engagement*</li> </ul>
 Management and operations	Organizations have the institutional experience, positioning, sustainability, and security to engage in and sustain FPRH advocacy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Leadership</li> <li>▪ Financial resource base</li> <li>▪ Human resources</li> <li>▪ Reputation and profile</li> <li>▪ Security and safety</li> <li>▪ Administrative support</li> <li>▪ Value of coalition to members*</li> </ul>

*Note: Coalition-specific components are marked with an asterisk [\*]. Full definitions of each component are provided in the ACR survey tool in [Annex A](#).*

## Using the ACR with Coalitions

The Hewlett Foundation's IRH advocacy strategy includes coalitions as well as individual organizations. In this context, coalitions are organized by Hewlett grantees to enable participating organizations to share skills and resources. With these coalitions, APEP has used an adapted version of the ACR process. This version incorporates questions and processes to identify the added value of coalition-based advocacy. APEP integrated three considerations for coalitions, which we detail next, drawing on research and experience and guided by the parameters of APEP's evaluation of the strategy.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Jim Coe and Chris Stalker, "Capacitybuilders Campaigning Programme: Evaluating Capacity Building" (London: Capacitybuilders, June 2009); Peter Plastrik, Madeleine Taylor, and John Cleveland, *Connecting to Change the World: Harnessing the Power of Networks for Social Impact* (Island Press, 2014); Christopher M. Weible et al., "A Quarter Century of the Advocacy Coalition Framework: An Introduction to the Special Issue," *Policy Studies Journal* 39, no. 3 (August 1, 2011): 349–60, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0072.2011.00412.x>; and Mona Younis, "Evaluating Coalitions and Networks: Frameworks, Needs, and Opportunities" (Center for Evaluation Innovation, 2017).

### 1. Assess collective, rather than individual, advocacy capacity

Mirroring the rationale for supporting coalitions, the ACR approaches the coalition as a collective. It reviews the collective capacities and practices, rather than assessing each organization and trying to draw a composite picture. This approach reflects how coalitions work; they do not necessarily draw on all the organizational resources of members, but rather what those members are willing/able to contribute. For practical reasons, it would also be potentially burdensome to ask coalition members to participate in individual as well as a group ACR process. Individual members might elect to use the ACR to conduct more in-depth self-assessment of their organization during the coalition's planning and start-up phases. In some circumstances, meeting each coalition member separately may be logistically more feasible.

### 2. Expect that the coalitions are shorter term, rather than permanent

Coalitions that are intentionally organized and funded to jointly achieve a specific advocacy objective are typically shorter-term collaborations. As a vehicle to support or enable advocacy, collective action is not open-ended. But we assume that a relatively consistent group of organizations participate in the coalition.

### 3. Balance level of effort with benefits

As with the individual ACRs, the process takes care to produce value for participants. This means balancing the time and level of information with what's most essential to stakeholders. Coalition ACRs do not cover all potential aspects of coalition-based advocacy. For example, they do not assess each organization's fitness for participation in the coalition. Coalition ACRs require about the same level of time and effort from coalitions as the individual ACR does.

The ACR includes five components that reflect coalition-specific practices or qualities: coalition planning, coalition coordination, coalition organization, coalition engagement, and the value of the coalition to its members. A definition of each is included in the ACR [survey tool](#).

## Who Is Involved in Implementing the ACR and Using the Results

In the context of APEP's evaluation, the facilitator, the CSOs, and Hewlett grantees are all involved in the ACR process. As summarized below, each has respective roles in the process and uses for the information produced.

	Facilitator (evaluation team)	CSO	Hewlett grantee
Preparation	Collaborate with the Foundation and grantee to identify participating CSOs; contact each CSO to introduce the ACR process and organize the in-person discussion; review any background documents shared by the CSO.	Cooperate with the facilitator to organize the in-person discussion and share relevant documents; identify and prepare staff and other stakeholder participants; review the ACR guide ahead of the discussion.	Help identify CSOs to participate in the ACR process and introduce them to the facilitator.
Facilitated discussion	Facilitate the in-person discussion with CSO staff.	In the facilitated discussion, complete the ACR survey and identify capacity strengthening priorities and plans.	
Reporting and follow-up	Collaborate with the CSO to produce the completed ACR report; liaise with the grantee to ensure the CSO has shared the draft capacity strengthening plan; and record ACR results in a tracking document for evaluation purposes.	Share the ACR results with their Hewlett grantee partner and engage the grantee in follow-up discussions, particularly to refine the draft capacity strengthening plan and identify ways the grantee and other resources may support the CSOs' implementation of the plan.	Review the final report and refine capacity strengthening priorities with CSO partners.

## Step-by-Step: How to Implement the ACR Process





## Preparation

The facilitator (evaluation team), the Hewlett grantee, and the CSO are all involved in this preparation stage:

1. The **evaluation team** will confirm with **grantees** which of their CSO partners will be participating in the ACR process.
2. The **grantee** will send email introductions, connecting the relevant **evaluation team member (facilitator)** with the **CSO**. For coalitions, the **grantee** will introduce the **facilitator** to the representatives of each coalition member or **coalition point person** from each organization.
3. The **facilitator** will follow up with the **CSO or coalition members** to brief them on the purpose and process of the ACR, and, after briefing, share the ACR worksheet (a summary version of this guide and tools) for the organization to review and schedule a date to conduct the in-person facilitated discussion. To help the facilitator understand the organization's background and history, the facilitator will encourage the CSO to share supporting documents, such as reports from past organizational or advocacy capacity reviews and strategic plans, and assure confidential and secure handling of documents. Before the facilitated discussion, the evaluation team member will follow up to confirm any questions about the process, tools, or who should be included in the discussion.
4. The **CSO** will prepare for the facilitated discussion by allocating up to half a day for the discussion and scheduling it to include organization leadership and advocacy staff. Other staff—such as research, monitoring, evaluation, and program staff—may be included, as well as any other stakeholders the CSOs thinks can add value or learn from the process (such as volunteers or board members). In advance of the facilitated discussion, the CSO will encourage all participating staff and other stakeholders to review the ACR worksheet. It will also provide the **facilitator** with any samples of documents (such as communications plans) or materials (such as media clips) that may help illustrate their work.
5. The **CSO** and **facilitator** will agree on a location to hold the facilitated discussion. Ideally, the **CSO** hosts the discussion at their offices, which will ease participation by relevant staff, enable easier access to supporting material than if the meeting is held off-site, and help the facilitator better understand the organization's context. For **coalitions**, the facilitated discussion can be held at a mutually convenient location, such as space where the coalition regularly meets.





## The Facilitated Discussion

The **facilitator** and **CSO** meet to conduct the in-person facilitated discussion. The meeting begins with an orientation, and then proceeds through the main discussion components described earlier: establishing the CSO's context and timeline; completing a review of the CSO's advocacy and organizational capacities, using the ACR survey tool; and identifying the CSO's capacity strengthening priorities and plans.

During this process, the facilitator is responsible for taking notes, documenting the discussion in a way that is transparent to the CSO, and subsequently drafting the report. When concluding the facilitated discussion, the facilitator and CSO should agree on next steps to finalize the report and resolve any outstanding questions.

### Step 1: Orient Participants

**Objective:** To ensure participants understand and are comfortable with the ACR purpose and process.

**Time:** Ten to thirty minutes, depending on participants' questions.

**Instructions:** Before starting the process, the facilitator should establish a comfortable and positive tone. The ground rules outlined in the box should be reviewed and participants invited to share any additional ground rules relevant to their organization or coalition. (These ground rules speak to the specific context of the Hewlett Foundation's evaluation but can be easily adapted for use in other contexts.)

#### Ground Rules

1. **Reflect the values of the Hewlett strategy's guiding principles.** The ACR process and experience should respect and reflect the principles of local ownership, mutual accountability, and the ACR's focus on supporting CSOs to own their process of identifying and addressing their capacity needs. The facilitator should reinforce these principles in tone and conduct during the facilitated discussion.
2. **Be transparent about dual evaluation and learning purposes.** The facilitator should be clear and open about the evaluative nature of the ACR while also emphasizing the principles and intention to provide a useful experience that supports organizational learning. The facilitator should be transparent about who should see the results; the data will be used by the evaluation team to evaluate the Hewlett Foundation's strategy, and the grantees are interested in the results for their own monitoring and to better support CSOs' capacity. Aggregated results will be shared with the Hewlett Foundation; the evaluation team will protect the CSOs' confidentiality.
3. **Ensure balanced assessments.** The facilitator should state that the evaluation team recognizes that reviews of organizational capacity may create vulnerabilities, particularly if they illuminate challenges or limitations. We know that organizations may be inclined to positively bias their responses. We ask that participating organizations commit to frank and open participation and honest responses. The evaluation team commits to responsible and respectful use of the information that participating organizations share.

After participant introductions, the facilitator should introduce the process, emphasizing the intent of the ACR to be a constructive and useful process for organizations. Please state the goal of the process:

We will explore the organization’s current capacity to employ advocacy as a core organizational strategy to advance its FPRH goals over time and identify its priorities for cultivating related capacity and practices.

Next, the facilitator should review the contents of the ACR survey tool and allow ample time for participants to ask questions and raise concerns.

## Step 2: Establish CSO’s Context and Timeline

**Objective:** To identify key points in the organization’s development, how the organization has responded to changes and challenges, and history with FPRH advocacy that will enable the facilitator to understand the organization’s context and priorities.

**Time:** This exercise should take approximately one hour.

**Instructions:** The facilitator should prepare notes in advance, based on available information, and confirm details with the participants. The timeline can be constructed using Post-it notes, paper, white board, or any appropriate medium. The information should be summarized in the ACR report.

The discussion of context and timeline should focus on headline developments and should be a rapid-paced synopsis rather than a forensic examination of the organization’s history. Examples of key points to cover include:

- Organization’s founding
- Changes in leadership and board
- Development and implementation of strategic plans
- Major funding flows and purpose
- Introduction of FPRH
- Introduction of advocacy
- Major changes in programs and advocacy strategies or priorities
- Current advocacy priorities, campaigns, or activities

The organization and facilitator can note related details, such as the particular focus on the FPRH work, advocacy agendas, and any notable challenges. These can be referenced during the next step: reviewing the CSO’s capacities using the survey tool.



### Facilitator’s Tip:

This discussion of the CSO’s context and timeline requires active facilitation to ensure participants stay focused on headline developments rather than a step-by-step description of the organization’s development.

### Step 3: Complete Review of the CSO’s Advocacy and Organizational Capacity (Survey Tool)


**Objective:** Identify core organizational FPRH advocacy capacity strengths and weaknesses related to the components in the survey and any additional capacity items or details the CSO identifies as influential to its advocacy effectiveness.

**Time:** This exercise should take between two and four hours, depending on the organization’s size and the number of participants.

**Instructions:** The [survey tool in Annex A](#) covers twenty-one components of capacity and their respective definitions, organized into four broad categories: advocacy strategy and implementation, tactical skills, commitment, and management and operations.

First, review the tool’s four categories to ensure participants understand them. Next, using the survey as a guide, discuss each capacity and how the organization’s current practices align with it. For each capacity listed in the survey tool, review the definition and ensure participants are clear about what it means. Then ask the participants to identify the most appropriate representation of the organization’s practices with regard to that capacity, using the tool’s rating scale of “not present,” “minimal,” “moderate,” or “strong.” For each capacity, the tool provides a description of what each rating means. (As an example, the box below shows what each rating means for the CSO’s capacity to use media as an advocacy tactic.)

The facilitator should ask participants to share supporting details or examples, probe for the reasons motivating or limiting certain capacities, and include this information in the ACR notes. It is often helpful to use current or recent advocacy campaigns or projects to illustrate the capacities or practices.



**Coalition Reminder:**

For the purposes of coalition ACRs, *organization* should be interpreted as the collective efforts and resources of the coalition. Additional elements specifically related to coalitions are marked with an asterisk (\*) in the survey tool.

**Example: Definitions of capacity ratings in ACR survey tool**

	Not present	Minimal	Moderate	Strong	Not relevant
<b>Media</b>  Definition: Use of traditional and social media to engage key advocacy audiences	Limited if any contacts with media outlets, and organization makes little use of the media	Some media outreach, but coverage is incidental and not proactive or responsive to negative or inaccurate coverage	Organization has active contacts with media, resulting in some coverage but not optimally strategic	Uses established media relations for frequent and effective public communication to elevate accurate and strategic attention to advocacy issues	Tactic not relevant or provided by other partners

Any individual capacity is more complex than can be captured in a simple survey tool. The tool’s description of what the ratings mean for each capacity is intended to be general and allow for a range of organizations and contexts. Rarely does an organization perfectly align with all the aspects of the description under a single rating. It is appropriate to select ratings between categories (e.g., between “not present” and “minimal”). The ratings can be used for dashboard purposes.

At the end of each section of the survey tool, the facilitator should ask whether participants can identify any additional capacities that are important to their organization’s advocacy.

#### **Step 4: Identify the CSO’s Capacity Strengthening Priorities and Plans**

**Objective:** Translate the capacity discussion to steps the organization can take to address its own capacity needs and interests.

**Time:** Approximately one to two hours, depending on the number of priorities selected. (Add thirty minutes to one hour if doing an optional preliminary ranking exercise.)

**Instructions:** After completing the survey, the participants review the areas they have identified as relatively weaker or in need of development. Based on these, the organization selects its top priorities and outlines plans to address them. The process includes identifying potential resources to support these efforts.

These resources are not limited to those provided by the CSO’s grantee partner. They may include, for example, engagement with the Advocacy Accelerator or other online learning platforms, changes in organizational practices, or better use of existing resources. The CSO will need to subsequently engage with its grantee partner to discuss needs and interests, as well as availability of resources from the grantee and other sources.

The CSO should determine priorities based on its unique context and work. To help identify priorities, the following dynamics can be considered:

- Changes that are considered a priority in the organization’s work plan or strategic plan
- The significance of the problems created by the lack of capacity, such as barriers to advocacy effectiveness
- Immediate or low-hanging-fruit changes that can be easily achieved
- Major capacity issues that can be addressed through incremental, short-term steps

As the time frames for strengthening capacities will likely vary, organizations may wish to note details about the expected time frame for change.

If organizations identify many needs or there is not general agreement about priorities, an optional step is included to first rank needs by capacity element (see [Annex B](#) for a priority ranking worksheet). This process can be used to broker differences and a shared set of priorities. However, it is not typically necessary.

Once the top three to five priorities are identified, use brief responses to the following questions to help the CSO outline its capacity strengthening plans:

1. **What steps can the organization take to improve this capacity?** These may be immediate actions as well as short- or longer-term processes.
2. **What resources are needed?** These may be financial support, technical expertise, and information.
3. **What are potential sources for these resources?** Sources might be trainings provided by specific institutions, funders, or learning from other organizations.

Encourage participants to be as specific as possible. As the example below illustrates, some resources do not have direct financial costs, and sources of support may vary.

*Example: Using three questions to outline CSO's plans to strengthen a priority capacity*

Priority capacity	Advocacy monitoring and evaluation (M&E)
What steps can our organization take to improve this capacity?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Immediate: Post query on the Advocacy Accelerator Facebook page</li> <li>▪ Short-term: Introduce periodic progress self-reflection sessions and record results</li> <li>▪ Long-term: Work with INGO funder/partner to conduct staff training on advocacy M&amp;E and help streamline and refine our current system</li> </ul>
What resources are needed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Staff time</li> <li>▪ Leadership from management</li> <li>▪ Technical expertise</li> </ul>
What are potential sources for these resources?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Advocacy Accelerator</li> <li>▪ Internal</li> <li>▪ INGO funder/partner</li> </ul>

The worksheet on the following page can be used to record participants' answers to the three questions above. When working with the organization to complete the worksheet, the facilitator should emphasize that not all capacity needs may be addressed with resources or support from the Hewlett grantee partner.

**Worksheet: Outline of Organization’s Capacity Strengthening Plans**

**Priority 1:**

Steps our organization can take to improve this capacity

Resources needed

Sources

**Priority 2:**

Steps our organization can take to improve this capacity

Resources needed

Sources

**Priority 3:**

Steps our organization can take to improve this capacity

Resources needed

Sources

**Priority 4:**

Steps our organization can take to improve this capacity

Resources needed

Sources

**Priority 5:**

Steps our organization can take to improve this capacity

Resources needed

Sources



## Reporting and Follow-up


As soon as possible following the ACR meeting, the facilitator drafts a report documenting the results of the facilitated discussion. The report typically includes brief notes about the CSO's context and timeline, the completed survey tool, and the outline of the capacity development plan. The facilitator then sends this draft report to the CSO for review and comment. For coalitions, the report is sent to each coalition member lead.

Once the facilitator has incorporated CSO comments and finalized the report, the CSO ideally will share the report with its grantee partner. This can serve as the basis for a follow-up discussion between the CSO and grantee partner to refine the capacity strengthening plans and agree on any follow-up involving the grantee. The facilitator will also confirm with the grantee partner that the ACR has been completed, and may be called on to further facilitate the follow-up exchange between the grantee and CSO. In addition to more fully articulating their capacity development plans, CSOs are encouraged to use the ACR survey tool to periodically review their advocacy practices and progress.

In the context of the Hewlett Foundation evaluation, the facilitator also records the ACR results in a results tracker created in Excel. The evaluation team then triangulates data from ACRs across multiple CSOs with data gathered through other evaluation methods.


## Annex A: ACR Survey Tool



 <p><b>Advocacy Strategy and Implementation</b></p>	Organizations apply skills and organizational resources to develop and advance short- and long-term advocacy strategies.				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Strategy formulation</li> <li>▪ Advocacy planning</li> <li>▪ Learning and evaluation</li> <li>▪ Adaptation</li> <li>▪ Coalition planning*</li> <li>▪ Coalition coordination*</li> </ul>
	<b>Not present</b> 0	<b>Minimal</b> 1	<b>Moderate</b> 2	<b>Strong</b> 3	<b>COMMENTS</b>
<p><b>Strategy formulation</b></p> <p>Definition: Organization develops advocacy strategies with specific goals, objectives, and evidence base</p>	No overall strategy, but participate in ad hoc or limited advocacy activities	Advocacy strategies are in place but developed by project funders	Organization has developed advocacy strategy, but with some gaps	Organization has developed comprehensive advocacy strategy, with signs of implementation	
<p><b>Advocacy planning</b></p> <p>Definition: Advocacy strategies are supported by clear but adaptable implementation plans</p>	No overall advocacy implementation plan, but participate in ad hoc or limited advocacy activities	Advocacy implementation plans are developed by project funders	Organization develops comprehensive advocacy implementation, but they are rigid or have some gaps	Advocacy plans align with key aspects of the strategies, with clear timelines, roles, resources, and results	
<p><b>Learning and evaluation</b></p> <p>Definition: Internal self-reflection processes and learning efforts, monitoring and evaluation (M&amp;E) systems, and application of learning and data</p>	Limited, if any, organizational history with M&E; limited, if any, access to external information	M&E is designed to meet funder requirements and primarily reports activities and outputs, with little use for internal application or learning; limited access to or use of learning resources	Some use of M&E results for internal learning, with efforts to evaluate advocacy outcomes, though with some gaps; learning is supported by participation in learning platforms or external information.	Programmatic M&E is outcome/impact focused; staff can use M&E data to articulate projects' results; organization actively participates in learning platforms, seeks out new information, and applies learning	Note that this should include documentation of advocacy efforts and learning.

<b>Advocacy Strategy and Implementation</b> <i>(continued)</i>	<b>Not present</b> 0	<b>Minimal</b> 1	<b>Moderate</b> 2	<b>Strong</b> 3	<b>COMMENTS</b>
<p><b>Adaptation</b></p> <p>Definition: Organization makes changes to advocacy strategies or plans in response to developments or new information</p>	Advocacy activities are strictly implemented according to project plans	Some adjustments to advocacy activities tactics, but overall emphasis is on fidelity to existing plans	Some modification of advocacy plans, strategies, and tactics, but only when required by significant roadblocks or crisis	Organization regularly reviews plans using formal and informal data and other sources of information and makes changes accordingly	Probe for donors' responsiveness to adaptation and organization's efforts to encourage necessary flexibility.
<p><b>Coalition planning*</b></p> <p>Definition: Coalition members jointly develop plans with respective roles and coordination points</p>	There is no jointly developed coalition advocacy plan, and individual members' plans are not shared with other coalition members	Coalition advocacy plans are developed by project funders, and members are not familiar with other organizations' plans	Coalition members share plans, but inputs to others' plans are minimal	Coalition members jointly develop comprehensive advocacy plans	
<p><b>Coalition coordination*</b></p> <p>Definition: Coalition members coordinate implementation of plans, share information about results, and collaborate on decision-making to optimize complementarity and outcomes</p>	Coalition members independently implement activities and may share information about efforts after completion or during funder reporting processes	Coalition members independently implement activities, and the timing and content of other organizations' efforts have minimal or no influence; information sharing is informal and ad hoc	Coalition members periodically share information about plans, progress, and results and coordinate if circumstances permit	Coalition members regularly coordinate in advance of implementation; coordinate tactics, timing, and implementation when strategic; and jointly evaluate results	Probe for level of coordination and whether it is optimally strategic.
Notes about organization's practice	Organization may also note any additional capacities not included in the survey.				
Organization's priorities for developing capacity					


*Note: Elements specifically related to coalitions are marked with an asterisk [\*]*

 <p><b>Tactical Skills</b></p>	<p>Organizations have expertise or access to support to develop and implement appropriate advocacy tactics.</p>					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Advocacy tactic selection</li> <li>▪ Skills related to core advocacy tactics</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Not present</b> 0</p>	<p><b>Minimal</b> 1</p>	<p><b>Moderate</b> 2</p>	<p><b>Strong</b> 3</p>	<p><b>Not relevant</b></p>	<p><b>COMMENTS</b></p>
<p><b>Advocacy tactic selection and use</b></p> <p>Definition: Range of advocacy tactics employed by the organization and consideration of relative strategic merits</p>	<p>Limited, if any, organizational engagement in advocacy</p>	<p>Organization consistently uses the same set of advocacy tactics, regardless of the advocacy objectives or evidence of effectiveness</p>	<p>Advocacy tactics are selected based on organization’s strategic advantage and what might work best to influence decision-makers and advance advocacy objectives, but with some gaps</p>	<p>Advocacy tactics are selected based on organization’s strategic advantage and what might work best to influence decision-makers and advance advocacy objectives</p>		
<p><b>Core advocacy tactics</b></p>	<p>Definition: Use of common advocacy tactics below.</p>					
<p><b>Networking and coalition building<sup>5</sup></b></p> <p>Definition: Coordination and collaboration with other actors (individuals, organizations, platforms, coalitions) to pursue common advocacy objectives</p>	<p>Advocacy is pursued independently, with little or no connection to the advocacy objectives of other actors in the FPRH or related relevant sector(s)</p>	<p>Some sharing of advocacy plans with actors pursuing similar objectives, but with little or no coordination</p>	<p>Some coordination of advocacy tactics and/or collaboration on activities with other actors</p>	<p>Development and implementation of aligned and complementary strategies and tactics in collaboration with other actors</p>		<p>Emphasize decisions made based on the strategic value and relevance of networks and coalition participation rather than collaboration for the sake of collaboration.</p>

<sup>5</sup> For coalitions organized by Hewlett grantees, this element refers to networking with organizations outside the coalition.

<b>Tactical Skills</b> <i>(continued)</i>	<b>Not present</b> 0	<b>Minimal</b> 1	<b>Moderate</b> 2	<b>Strong</b> 3	<b>Not relevant</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
<p><b>Messaging and communications</b></p> <p>Definition: Identification of advocacy audiences; development and consistent use of targeted messages; and outreach strategies, such as messengers, for each distinct audience</p>	<p>No communications plans or implementation; any messages are inconsistent and/or audiences and outreach strategies are not clear</p>	<p>Communications are implemented but plans are ad hoc and/or messages and outreach strategies are not tailored to audiences</p>	<p>Communications are planned, but with some gaps in clarity of messages, audiences, and strategies to reach audiences, or implementation</p>	<p>Communications plans are developed and implemented, with reach and reactions of audiences monitored and strategies adjusted in response</p>	<p>Tactic not relevant or provided by other partners</p>	
<p><b>Media</b></p> <p>Definition: Use of traditional and social media to engage key advocacy audiences</p>	<p>Limited if any contacts with media outlets, and organization makes little use of the media</p>	<p>Some media outreach, but coverage is incidental and not proactive or responsive to negative or inaccurate coverage</p>	<p>Organization has active contacts with media, resulting in some coverage but not optimally strategic</p>	<p>Uses established media relations for frequent and effective public communication to elevate accurate and strategic attention to advocacy issues</p>	<p>Tactic not relevant or provided by other partners</p>	
<p><b>Policy development processes</b></p> <p>Definition: Understanding and use of policy development processes to propose or inform policy solutions</p>	<p>No policy solutions are proposed and/or mechanisms to adopt desired policies are not understood</p>	<p>Policy ideas are general and organization lacks detailed understanding of mechanisms or how they may be influenced</p>	<p>Policy proposals are well developed and evidenced, with understanding of actual or potential policy-making processes</p>	<p>Comprehensive and evidence-based policy proposals and policy decision-making processes are engaged according to organization's strategic advantage</p>	<p>Tactic not relevant or provided by other partners</p>	


<b>Tactical Skills</b> <i>(continued)</i>	<b>Not present</b> 0	<b>Minimal</b> 1	<b>Moderate</b> 2	<b>Strong</b> 3	<b>Not relevant</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
<p><b>Use of research and evidence</b></p> <p>Definition: Use of research and evidence to identify problems, analyze existing policy, and develop proposals for policy and service solutions</p>	Proposals to introduce new or reform existing policy are not supported by analysis or evidence	Policy proposals are based on ideals, but any supporting evidence has been gathered to support a predetermined solution rather than to inform the policy	Clear and well-documented evidence is used to develop policy solutions, but with some significant gaps in evidence and analysis	Clear and well-documented research and evidence is used to develop policy solutions, and gaps in evidence are acknowledged	Tactic not relevant or provided by other partners	
<p><b>Government or policymaker relations</b></p> <p>Definition: Engagement of institutions and actors whose decisions are critical to advancing advocacy objectives directly and/or through key individuals with access and influence</p>	Any efforts to engage decision-makers are indirect or passive	General understanding of institutions and actors whose decisions are critical to advancing advocacy objectives, but efforts to engage them are limited or underutilize organization's potential strategic advantage	Clear understanding of institutions and actors whose decisions are critical to advancing advocacy objectives with tailored efforts to reach and educate them according to the organization's strategic advantage	Effective, appropriate, and strategic engagement with appropriate government or policy-making bodies, and with the specific people within those bodies who are responsible for making decisions		
Notes about organization's practice	Organization may also note any additional tactics not included in the survey					
Organization's priorities for developing capacity						

 <p><b>Commitment</b></p>	<p>Organizations initiate and maintain continuous commitment to FPRH issues and advocacy</p>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mission alignment with FPRH and advocacy</li> <li>▪ Organizational values</li> <li>▪ Sector engagement</li> <li>▪ Constituent connections</li> <li>▪ Coalition engagement*</li> <li>▪ Coalition organization*</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Not present</b> 0</p>	<p><b>Minimal</b> 1</p>	<p><b>Moderate</b> 2</p>	<p><b>Strong</b> 3</p>	<p><b>COMMENTS</b></p>
<p><b>Mission alignment with FPRH and advocacy</b></p> <p>Definition: Connections between organization mission and FPRH issues and advocacy</p>	<p>Mission is unrelated or at odds with FPRH issues and policy, and/or advocacy</p>	<p>Mission relates indirectly to FPRH issues and policy, and/or advocacy</p>	<p>Mission generally aligns with FPRH issues and advocacy, but with some ambiguity, or disconnects with critical aspects, such as inclusion of comprehensive FPRH issues or limitations on advocacy tactics</p>	<p>Mission is clearly aligned with comprehensive FPRH issues and advocacy, enabling full and dynamic engagement in FPRH policy advocacy</p>	
<p><b>Organization values</b></p> <p>Definition: Organization traditions, constituents, history, and other determinants of support for organization’s engagement in FPRH issues and advocacy</p>	<p>Values are not supportive or are at odds with FPRH issues and policy, and/or advocacy</p>	<p>Values introduce barriers or limitations to organization’s engagement in FPRH issues and policy, and/or advocacy</p>	<p>Values generally support FPRH issues and advocacy, with some ambiguity or reservations that limit engagement</p>	<p>Values are strongly supportive and contribute to robust engagement with comprehensive FPRH issues and policy advocacy</p>	<p>Please note staffs’/managers’ level of advocacy interest/support.</p>

<b>Commitment</b> <i>(continued)</i>	<b>Not present</b> 0	<b>Minimal</b> 1	<b>Moderate</b> 2	<b>Strong</b> 3	<b>COMMENTS</b>
<p><b>Sector engagement</b></p> <p>Definition: Connection and collaboration with other actors, such as civil society organizations, coalitions, researchers, and service providers at relevant country, regional, and/or international levels</p>	No active connections with other actors in the FPRH, health and development, or other related sectors	Limited active connections or collaboration with other actors in the FPRH, health and development, or other related sectors	Some strategic collaborations with other actors in the FPRH, health and development, or other related sectors	Active and mutually beneficial collaborations with others in the FPRH, health and development, or other related sectors at different relevant geographic levels	Please note specific sectors
<p><b>Constituent connections</b></p> <p>Definition: Relationships and feedback loops with communities or groups of individuals the organization’s FPRH advocacy efforts are intended to serve (aka beneficiaries)</p>	No clear constituents or groups of individuals the organization’s FPRH advocacy efforts are intended to serve	General clarity about constituents, but limited, if any, effort to engage them	Some efforts to engage representatives of communities or groups of individuals policy advocacy is aimed at serving	Robust and dynamic feedback loops with communities or groups of individuals policy advocacy is aimed at serving, which are used to inform policy and advocacy priorities	
<p><b>Coalition engagement*</b></p> <p>Definition: Coalition members have a shared sense of purpose and clear perception of the added value to advocacy effectiveness of working in coalition and jointly assume the responsibility for coalition-based advocacy</p>	Coalition members are participating in the coalition but could do the same work independently without being organized as a coalition	Coalition members have a general view of the added value to advocacy of working in coalition and contribute as needed but limit participation	Coalition members have a general sense of shared purpose based on support for their individual organization goals and consistently participate to the extent time and resources allow	Coalition members articulate a clear shared purpose beyond individual organization goals and actively draw on their organizations’ resources to contribute to the shared efforts of the coalition	

<b>Commitment</b> <i>(continued)</i>	<b>Not present</b> 0	<b>Minimal</b> 1	<b>Moderate</b> 2	<b>Strong</b> 3	<b>COMMENTS</b>
<p><b>Coalition organization*</b></p> <p>Clear allocation of roles, responsibilities, and tasks based on comparative advantages of each coalition member</p>	<p>Coalition members are unclear about why other organizations are in the coalition and what they contribute</p>	<p>Coalition members have general ideas about other member organizations and their contributions and roles</p>	<p>Coalition members understand comparative strategic advantages and respective roles of members, with some gaps in ability or willingness to allocate efforts accordingly</p>	<p>Coalition members actively develop roles, responsibilities, and tasks based on members' particular strengths and positioning</p>	<p>Probe for duplication of efforts and gaps.</p>
<p>Notes about organization's practice</p>	<p>Organization may also note any additional factors influencing organizational commitment that are not included in the survey</p>				
<p>Organization's priorities for developing capacity</p>					



 <p><b>Management and Operations</b></p>	<p>Organizations have the institutional experience, positioning, sustainability, and security to engage in and sustain FPRH advocacy.</p>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Leadership involvement</li> <li>▪ Financial resource base</li> <li>▪ Human resources</li> <li>▪ Reputation and profile</li> <li>▪ Security</li> <li>▪ Value of coalition to members*</li> </ul>
	<b>Not present</b> 0	<b>Minimal</b> 1	<b>Moderate</b> 2	<b>Strong</b> 3	<b>COMMENTS</b>
<p><b>Leadership</b></p> <p>Definition: Engagement of organization’s leadership in FPRH advocacy</p>	<p>Neither president/CEO or board participates in FPRH advocacy efforts, such as providing strategic guidance</p>	<p>President/CEO and/or board occasionally participate in FPRH advocacy efforts</p>	<p>President/CEO and/or board participates in some aspects of FPRH advocacy and strategy development</p>	<p>President/CEO and/or board actively leverage profile, contacts, expertise, and organizational resources on behalf of organization’s FPRH advocacy</p>	
<p><b>Financial resource base</b></p> <p>Definition: Availability and use of resources to support FPRH advocacy</p>	<p>Limited and inconsistent resources to support FPRH advocacy, from any source</p>	<p>Resources to support FPRH advocacy are exclusively drawn from one or two small/short-term grants</p>	<p>Organization draws on a mix of core organizational, grant, and other resources to support FPRH advocacy</p>	<p>Organization draws on a consistent mix of core organizational, grant, and other resources to support and sustain ongoing FPRH advocacy</p>	<p>Probe for duration of grants and about interruptions to your FPRH advocacy when a grant ends.</p>
<p><b>Human resources</b></p> <p>Definition: Availability and engagement of staff and consultants to support FPRH advocacy</p>	<p>No available organization staff to manage FPRH advocacy; consultants are engaged to deliver advocacy projects</p>	<p>Organization staff participate in or manage grant-funded FPRH advocacy, but rely on consultants to deliver on grant requirements</p>	<p>Organization staff participate in or manage grant-funded FPRH advocacy, and consultants are engaged to fill technical gaps</p>	<p>Organization staff have expertise and time to fully and effectively engage in FPRH advocacy</p>	

<b>Management and Operations</b> <i>(continued)</i>	<b>Not present</b> 0	<b>Minimal</b> 1	<b>Moderate</b> 2	<b>Strong</b> 3	<b>COMMENTS</b>
<p><b>Reputation and profile</b></p> <p>Definition: Organization’s positioning in FPRH or related sectors as an FPRH advocacy influencer</p>	<p>Organization has no track record of involvement or advocacy on FPRH or related issues, or connections or positioning that may facilitate FPRH advocacy</p>	<p>Organization is not well known, has limited experience with FPRH or related advocacy, and/or has limited connections with policy decision-makers or other influencers</p>	<p>Organization is an established actor in FPRH or related sector, with some experience with policy advocacy</p>	<p>Organization serves as a thought leader and resource on FPRH advocacy</p>	<p>Probe for the extent to which the reputation/profile is centered on an individual associated with the organization or the organization itself.</p> <p>Probe for the extent to which policy makers, media, and other platforms request information, guidance, and participation from your organization.</p>
<p><b>Security</b></p> <p>Definition: Safeguards for personnel and data security to protect against threats generated by advocacy and/or FPRH involvement</p>	<p>No perceived threats or contingency plans in place to protect security</p>	<p>Some consideration of potential threats and responses</p>	<p>Limited plans employed to protect physical and data security</p>	<p>Comprehensive organizational security plan employed and resourced; staff trained and actively taking measures to protect personnel and data security</p>	
<p><b>Administrative systems</b></p> <p>Definition: Availability of systems to manage funds, documents, data, appointments, and other supports for advocacy efforts</p>	<p>Organization unable to track revenues and expenses; challenges locating files or documents</p>	<p>Administrative and financial systems occasionally hamper staff effectiveness</p>	<p>Administrative systems generally support advocacy work; rare breakdowns</p>	<p>Administration runs smoothly; organization can focus on its advocacy</p>	

Management and Operations (continued)	Not present 0	Minimal 1	Moderate 2	Strong 3	COMMENTS
<p><b>Value of coalition to members*</b></p> <p>Definition: Sense of additive value of coalition participation for the participating organizations in terms of advancing organizations' operations, enhancing technical skills, greater advocacy effectiveness, and other benefits in balance with costs</p>	Coalition participation is burdensome with limited or no clear benefits	Coalition participation yields some benefits or potential benefits to individual members beyond advocacy effectiveness, but requires time and other resources out of balance with potential rewards	Coalition participation yields some clear and tangible benefits to individual members beyond advocacy effectiveness, but with significant trade-offs in terms of required time and other resources	Coalition participation provides significant value to individual member organizations beyond advocacy effectiveness that significantly outweigh any costs	
Notes about organization's practice	Organization may also note any additional factors influencing organizational commitment that are not included in the survey				
Organization's priorities for developing capacity					

## Annex B: Worksheet to Rank Capacity Strengthening Priorities (Optional Activity)

Complete the table below by ranking priority areas for strengthening. Participants should discuss their different perspectives about priorities and come to a consensus about the top-ranked priorities.

### Organizational Capacity Development Priorities

	Capacity	Priority Ranking (1 = highest)
Advocacy strategy and implementation	Strategy formulation	
	Advocacy planning	
	Learning and evaluation	
	Adaptation	
	Coalition planning*	
	Coalition organization*	
Tactical skills	Advocacy tactic selection	
	Skills related to core advocacy tactics	
Commitment	Mission alignment with FPRH and advocacy	
	Organizational values	
	Sector engagement	
	Constituent connections	
	Coalition engagement*	
	Coalition organization*	
Management and operations	Leadership	
	Financial resource base	
	Human resources	
	Reputation and profile	
	Security and safety	
	Administrative systems	
	Value of coalition to members*	
Other		

*Note: Coalition-specific capacities are marked with an asterisk [\*]*

## Annex C: Summary of Learning That Informed the ACR Approach

The ACR draws on current literature, evaluators’ experience, and recent learning in the fields of capacity development and civil society strengthening. It should be noted, however, that within this considerable body of resources there is a dearth of research about the experience and usefulness of advocacy capacity assessments from the perspective of CSOs. The ACR is also aligned with the principles and goal of the Hewlett IRH advocacy strategy.

The ACR incorporates six critical characteristics, which may be a departure from other capacity assessments that grantees or CSOs have experienced.

### 1. Approaches that are complexity-aware

The design of capacity assessments is often constructed around linear or monocausal relationships between capacity change and capacity support. In other words, they assume changes in capacity are directly related to capacity support provided by one source and don’t take into account other ways capacity is influenced. Interventions to support capacity development also often focus on simply filling pre-identified gaps for missing functions and skills with imported or historic solutions. A groundbreaking, five-year research study on capacity, change, and performance demonstrates that there are no blueprints for capacity development and that the process tends to be more complex, nuanced, and unpredictable than is often assumed.<sup>6</sup> A complexity-aware approach to capacity assessment looks beyond the capacities to deliver results—such as technical skills and management processes—to identify other factors that drive organizational behavior.

» **ACR response:** Our approach incorporates complexity awareness by framing capacity as encompassing skills, practices, and conditions that enable capacity development. The approach will be used to understand capacity changes and to gauge the contribution of external support and other influences within the individual context of each organization.

### 2. Capacity development as endogenous

Organizations have the agency and power to develop capacity. It’s an internal or endogenous phenomenon. External actors can *facilitate* capacity development, but they cannot make it happen. An organization’s response to capacity support incorporates many different influences: culture, other resources, receptivity and interest, opportunities to apply learning, and even learning practices within the organization itself. This points to two lessons: the limitations of trying to understand or measure capacity from the perspective of any one intervention and, most important, an orientation to capacity that places ownership of capacity squarely with the CSO.

» **ACR response:** The ACR process is designed to respect and support this ownership by incorporating capacity development priorities and plans to be implemented by the CSO. This includes prioritizing capacity development needs and identifying potential sources for support, including internal resources and external resources beyond the Hewlett grantee.

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, “Facilitating Resourcefulness: Synthesis Report of the Evaluation of Dutch Support to Capacity Development:” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, August 2011).

### 3. Processes that are facilitative and supportive

Capacity assessments can reinforce power imbalances and introduce tensions. Feedback from participants in capacity development programs tells us that such assessments may be experienced as audits and judgments, often based on a Western construct of advocacy and organizations. They may be designed or viewed to serve the needs of funders or international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), rather than the organization being assessed, and therefore extractive. Positive response bias is a risk, particularly if the purpose of the assessment is to report to funders. The downside of an externally guided process is that external assessors may be less likely to uncover what is really going on inside an organization. In both scenarios, measures of institutional capacity are subjective and rely on individual judgment and interpretation.

**ACR response:** Recognizing these tensions, the ACR aims to take power relationships into account by facilitating a constructive process. We try to limit subjectivity, balancing self-reporting with more empirical observations, clearly defining the capacity area being measured, and providing clear criteria against which it is being judged. Multiple participants strengthen the approach as a learning process and are intended to also mitigate bias.

### 4. Advocacy as a core organizational strategy

Prerequisites of a vibrant civil society engaged in advocacy include both stability and continuity of participation in advocacy. Further, for CSO partners to play a sustained and dynamic role in line with the Hewlett Foundation's IRH advocacy strategy, they must be able to continuously review and renew their own advocacy strategies. In contrast, project-based capacity support tends to focus on the tactical skills and knowledge required to implement a particular project. Supporting an organization's capacity to incorporate and effectively use advocacy as one of its core organizational strategies involves all aspects of an organization's functions.

**ACR response:** The ACR process and survey are not based on one concept of "correct" advocacy and apply across environments and advocacy contexts. We are also focusing on a limited set of organizational capacities that play critical enabling roles in FPRH advocacy.

### 5. Discrete use of quantitative measures and scores

Using numbers to represent capacity can be helpful when those numbers are recognized as relative and not absolute measures. Many tools for measuring capacity rely on ordinal scales, in which values can be ranked from high to low or more to less in relation to each other. Even with use of scoring criteria and trained facilitators, what one person scores as a 2 another might consider a 3. While useful in ordering along a continuum, these scores can be misleading. Indicators are themselves a means to gather, structure, and discuss perceptions and information, and should not be considered precise and complete representations of the capacities. Overemphasizing the importance of scores could lead to both a false sense of precision about an organization's capacity and interpretation of scores as a predictor of advocacy effectiveness. In practice, it is the interaction of the different attributes that shape overall capacity.

**ACR response:** The ACR uses scores as helpful dashboards to track trends, complemented by qualitative descriptions of an organization's capacity, practices, and perspectives on the indicator or category.

## 6. Privileging local solutions

Ownership of local solutions—and sustained engagement by CSOs in advancing those solutions—should be modeled by the capacity development intervention and measurements and interventions.

**ACR response:** The final step in the facilitated discussion is identifying priorities and potential solutions. It is careful not to promise that every need will be addressed or to procure resources on behalf of the CSO. Incorporating discussion of solutions is intended to reinforce the perspective that the assessment is a constructive process for the organization under review.

Experience and feedback also suggest that the best measurement systems are designed to be as simple as possible: not too time-consuming, not unreasonably costly, yet able to provide organizations and funders with good information that meets their needs. The ACR is designed for experience and results to be useful to the CSO, requiring a balanced level of effort that will not overburden CSOs, the grantee, or other organizations facilitating the process.