

System-level Functions and Community Capacity Self-Assessment

Community:	
Completion date:	

Introduction

This worksheet aims to help Built for Zero communities take a snapshot of their staffing capacity as it relates to the system-level functions critical to system-improvement work.

Introduction

- [What gap is this document addressing?](#)
- [Definitions](#)
- [How to use this worksheet](#)

System Level Functions

- [Function 1: Community Engagement and Network Building](#)
- [Function 2: Visioning and Goal Setting](#)
- [Function 3: Partnership Coordination and Communications](#)
- [Function 4: Fund Development and Resource Alignment](#)
- [Function 5: Measuring Community-Level Impact](#)
- [Function 6: Building Partner Capacity](#)
- [Function 7: Organizing and Advocacy for Systems Change](#)

Summary

- [References and Next Steps](#)

What gap is this document addressing?

Making system-level improvements that address complex social challenges such as homelessness require collaboration and coordination among a range of agencies operating within a common geography (non-profits, faith-based organizations, government entities, etc.). Built for Zero believes a distinct set of system-level functions are critical to the success of place-based systems aiming to create population-level changes.

This worksheet is intended as a conversation starter around the degree to which your community can successfully execute these system-level functions. Specifically, given that work only happens when *people* do that work, this document frames these conversations around your community's dedicated human capacity to execute these functions. It aims to help shed light on the question of **what kind of human capacity support would be highest-leverage in order to bolster your community's ability to execute system-level functions?**

To note, human capacity is just one necessary component of an effective system-level function. This worksheet doesn't address other kinds of barriers such as institutional, inter-agency relationship, or political challenges. However, if you find a given function has the right dedicated capacity and is still ineffective, that suggests there are other factors in play.

Definitions

System-level functions are a distinct set of actions that communities use to *support and coordinate programmatic activity across the community partners* in a given geography. They are the necessary and critical functions that allow your community to make system improvements in a strategic manner. The functions are:

- Community Engagement and Network Building
- Visioning and Goal Setting
- Partnership Coordination and Communications
- Fund Development and Resource Alignment
- Measuring Community-Level Impact
- Building Partner Capacity
- Organizing and Advocacy for Systems Change

These functions serve as the connective tissue within and between programmatic efforts (coordinated entry, outreach, or property manager engagement, etc.) and they are *precursors to system improvement* within any programmatic effort. For example, a community with strong Visioning and Goal Setting and Partnership Coordination/ Communications functions can more effectively evolve their case conferencing processes to fit emerging

needs because all participating agencies are on the same page about what success looks like.

Depending on the complexity of your community and its programs, it may be beneficial to house these functions both at the whole-community level and within major programs (i.e. ensuring your wider community and CES program both have dedicated capacity for Community Engagement and Network Building). For more

These functions are drawn from findings gathered by Community Solutions, StriveTogether, and the Nonprofit Finance Fund. We believe every community should consider whether they can support these functions regardless of whether they are a place-based partnership, a backbone agency, a lead organization, or just a representative of their community.

Staffing capacity is your community's collective ability to fulfill a function. One way to think about staffing capacity is to break it down into a function of a combination of factors:

- **Role Clarity:** The degree to which *what success looks like* for a given function is understood by those tasked to bring it about and is *formally assigned* to someone's role. Progress is slowed if the entire scope of responsibilities is undefined or if it is "extra" work staff take on in addition to the work in their job description.
- **Capacity:** The *staff bandwidth* dedicated to a given function. Progress is slowed if there simply isn't enough time and energy devoted to the function.
- **Training:** The degree to which staff are properly equipped to *maximize the impact of their time* dedicated to a given function. Progress is slowed if a position isn't equipped to address the challenges they are facing.
- **Sustainability:** The degree to which staff can *continue to dedicate time* to a given function. Progress is slowed if work on a function is stopping and starting due to funding instability.

One way to think about these staff capacity factors is as a part of a multiplication equation:

$$\text{Role Clarity} \times \text{Capacity} \times \text{Training} \times \text{Sustainability} = \text{Progress on System-level Function}$$

For example, if a community has a number of well-trained staff dedicated to a function but the responsibilities are informally scattered across a range of staff ("It's not really in my job description but I started doing it one day and now I'm just the person who does it"), the community wouldn't be maximizing the bandwidth or talents of their staff.

Identifying the factor with the greatest potential for improvement will have a *multiplicative impact* on your community's overall capacity to fulfill a function. In our example, strengthening Role Clarity would help ensure that lane of work remains a priority within

someone's day-to-day and empowers them to take ownership of the function's current state and progress.

How to use this worksheet

This worksheet can be used individually or as a team. Either way, it is designed as a **conversation starter**. Share your assessment with others to see where your perspectives align or diverge!

Double-click the **dropdown menus** in each section to indicate your assessment of your community's staff capacity within each function. Feel free to take notes in the space provided. At the end of the worksheet, look at a summary of your self-assessment and come up with a few action items.

Note: Don't be too hesitant around any given part of the assessment! This tool is meant to stimulate reflection and generate conversation - it is not a judgment on any single person or community. Rather than getting bogged down in a section, you can always do a first-pass to view your summary and then return to specific sections to refine and add notes.

System Level Functions

Function 1: Community Engagement and Network Building

What this looks like

Harnessing the power of bringing people together. Creating connections between community members and organizations. Building networks and convening community partners from different sectors with intention and purpose to foster collaboration, set goals, and advance a shared agenda.

How to do this well

- All levels of staff in your community have and continue to cultivate skills in relationship management, meeting design, and facilitation. *Meaningful capacity is dedicated to network building*, including developing new ties with potential stakeholders and deepening relationships with existing community partners – consistently and over time.
- Touchpoints with partner organizations and community members honor and navigate the history of oppression, trauma, and racism in the community to “set a table” where all voices are welcomed, heard, and valued. Ample time is spent on building trust between individuals and engagement is structured in multiple ways to allow for different means of collaboration (both formal and informal) and the emergence of new ideas (e.g., group meetings, one-on-one conversations, town hall style forums, surveys and written engagement, participation of community leadership in existing community spaces).
- Participants are financially compensated at appropriate levels for their continued involvement.



Community Engagement and Network Building

Harnessing the power of bringing people together. Creating connections between community members and organizations. Building networks and convening community partners from different sectors with intention and purpose to foster collaboration, set goals, and advance a shared agenda.

Overall, how well is this function performed in your community?	Your response: (Select response) ▾ <hr/> <i>Additional notes?</i>
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Capacity: To what extent is the staff time dedicated to this function sufficient to perform it?	Your response: (Select response) ▾ <hr/> <i>Additional notes?</i>
Training: Are staff sufficiently trained to perform this function?	Your response: (Select response) ▾ <hr/> <i>Additional notes?</i>
Sustainability: Does your community have sustainable resources to continue funding dedicated staff capacity to this function?	Your response: (Select response) ▾ <hr/> <i>Additional notes?</i>

[Jump to Summary](#)

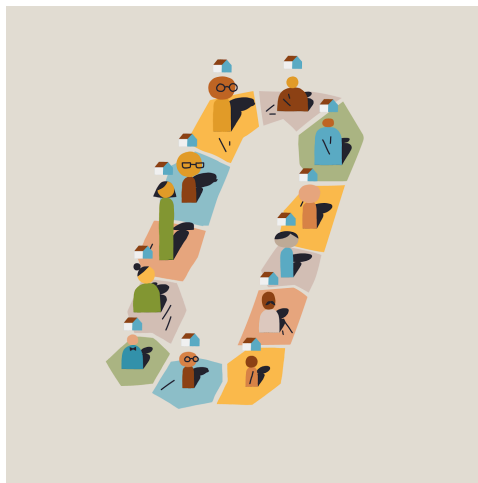
Function 2: Visioning and Goal Setting

What this looks like

Facilitating the creation of a shared vision for the community. Setting clear and measurable community-wide goals. Securing the buy-in of partner organizations and aligning them around common outcomes and goals.

How to do this well

- Visioning centers those most impacted by the systems being improved.
- The views, input, and *expertise of partner organizations and community members are gathered* and prioritized in a cohesive community strategy.
- Methodologies outside of dominant professional norms are used to surface ideas and set priorities (e.g., looking outside of the academic literature and research approaches to define relevant outcomes).
- Community-wide goals are specific, measurable, and time-bound and center equity.



Visioning and Goal Setting

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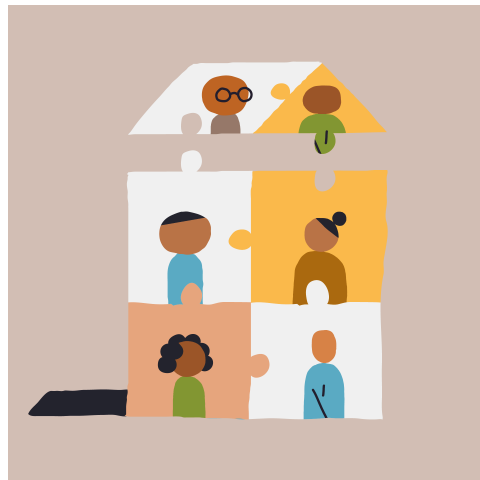
Function 3: Partnership Coordination and Communications

What this looks like

Keeping all partners moving forward on a shared action plan to advance the collective vision. Holding the partnership accountable to community-wide goals. Facilitating the flow of information between partners. Communicating about the partnership's work to the public.

How to do this well

- The community develops a shared action plan for continuous advancement toward equitable outcomes, identifies associated resource needs (e.g. , budgets), and *coordinates participation of partners to ensure progress* on this plan. This includes assessment of strengths and contributions of partners, ensuring appropriate placement of needed expertise and staff, providing ongoing oversight of service delivery, and the strategic use of data to guide the partnership's work.
- The community builds a data-oriented culture within the partnership to enable partners to understand what's working and what's not, and to adjust the partnership's ongoing work.
- The community develops and regularly disseminates accessible messaging on the partnership's progress both internally (i.e., between partners) and externally (i.e., through a website, annual report, newsletter, etc.).



Partnership Coordination and Communications

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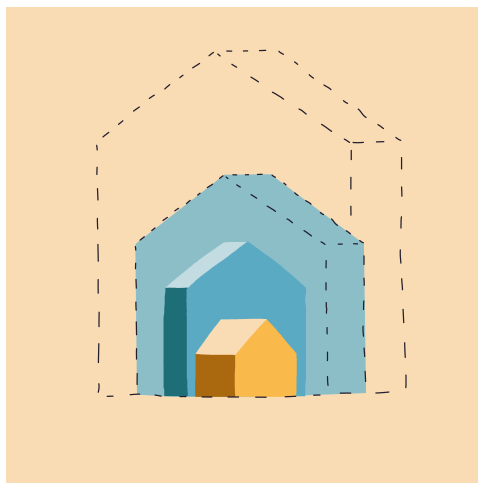
Function 4: Fund Development and Resource Alignment

What this looks like

Securing financial resources aligned with partnership goals and action plans. Managing and directing the flow of funds across the partnership toward activities tied to outcomes. Handling fundraising, resource management, and financial reporting to sustain both community operations and the participation of partner organizations and community members.

How to do this well

- Responsible party within the partnership has the *technical expertise and systems to secure, blend, and braid funding from various sources* and with various restrictions, pass through funding to community partners, track budgets to actual spending, facilitate grant and contract reporting, and ensure funding compliance across partners.
- The community cultivates a portfolio of funding that includes unrestricted/flexible resources and those expressly available to support community operations.
- Secured funding is sufficient to ensure partners are appropriately and regularly compensated for their participation and not expected to “volunteer” their time. This is particularly important for engaging nonprofits whose restricted funding sources otherwise limit where staff can spend their time as well as individuals with limited financial means.



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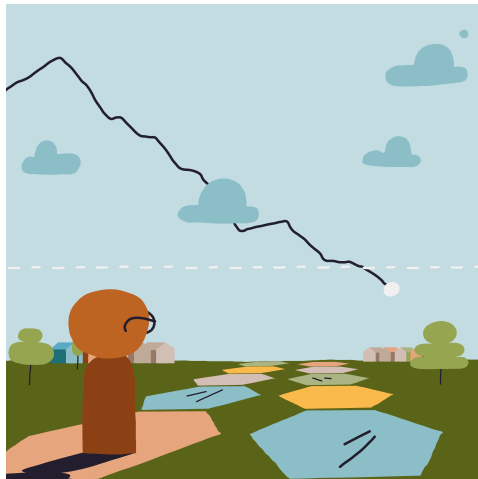
Function 5: Measuring Community-Level Impact

What this looks like

Managing shared systems for collecting and analyzing community-level data. Utilizing data to help the community understand and track its progress toward shared goals over time, to engage in continuous improvement, and to make the case for funding.

How to do this well

- Measurement of community-level impact includes data, sources, and methods that are mutually agreed upon by partners as sound and important to the community, center equity, enable understanding of system performance and progress toward achievement of goals and outcomes, and are necessary to satisfy funding requirements.
- The community *employs staff with the necessary technical skills* to enable effective utilization of data to support partnership goals. This may include facilitating data sharing across partners, conducting data collection and analysis, monitoring data quality, translating data into actionable insights, and coaching partners on using data to inform their work.
- Responsible party develops and maintains mechanisms for community-wide reporting and review of outcomes (e.g., a public-facing dashboard or regular community review meetings). Data analysis and reports examine inequities in outcomes, including by race.



Measuring Community-Level Impact

Managing shared systems for collecting and analyzing community-level data. Utilizing data to help the community understand and track its progress toward shared goals over time, to engage in continuous improvement, and to make the case for funding.

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[Jump to Summary](#)

Function 6: Building Partner Capacity

What this looks like

Collaborating with community partners to help them build and strengthen lasting practices, capabilities, and systems that support the advancement of community outcomes.

How to do this well

- Areas for capacity building are responsive to the needs and interests identified by partner organizations and community members. The community uses data to spot opportunities for improvement (either at the community level or for individual partners/service providers/community members).
- Partnership leverages the expertise of individual partners as well as opportunities to access relevant funding and to build capacity available through broader, aligned efforts (e.g., via national networks of place-based partnerships and collective impact efforts, such as Built for Zero and StriveTogether).
- Partnership stays current on learnings and strong practices in the relevant fields locally and nationally.



Building Partner Capacity

Collaborating with community partners to help them build and strengthen lasting practices, capabilities, and systems that support the advancement of community outcomes.

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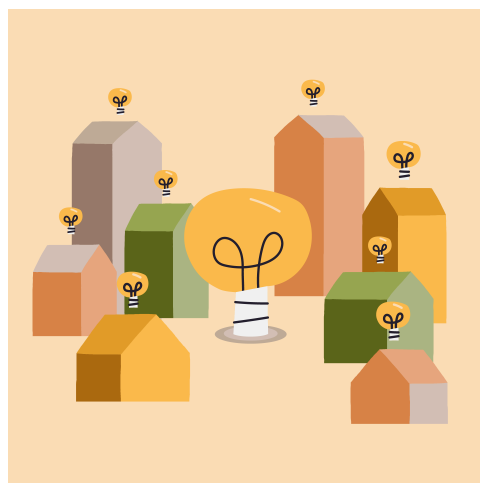
Function 7: Organizing and Advocacy for Systems Change

What this looks like

Coordinating a range of efforts to align policies, organizational practices, public opinion, and funding allocations with the outcomes sought by the place-based partnership.

How to do this well

- The community leans into its particular strengths and is aware of relevant limitations (e.g., bans on lobbying activities for nonprofits). For instance, governmental entities might best be positioned to “advocate from within” to align public dollars with partnership goals or change bureaucratic processes to advance outcomes, whereas communities structured as coalitions might best support get-out-the-vote efforts for candidates that are aligned with the partnership’s legislative objectives.
- The community *develops a collective advocacy agenda*, initiating and securing funding for organizing and advocacy activities that make change and hold that change long term.
- The community connects to the advocacy work of broader, aligned efforts (e.g., state-wide coalitions of nonprofits, national networks of place-based partnerships).



Organizing and Advocacy for System Change

Coordinating a range of efforts to align policies, organizational practices, public opinion, and funding allocations with the outcomes sought by the place-based partnership.

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Summary

	Overall	Role Clarity	Capacity	Training	Sustainability
Community Engagement and Networking	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)
Visioning and Goal Setting	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)
Partnership Coordination and Communications	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)
Fund Development and Resource Alignment	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)
Measuring Community-Level Impact	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)
Building Partner Capacity	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)
Organizing and Advocacy for Systems Change	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)	(Select respons... ▾)

Reviewing your self-assessment **row-by-row**, what stands out to you? What functions are your community strengths and areas for growth?

Additional notes?

Reviewing your self-assessment **column-by-column**, what stands out to you? What are the strengths and areas for growth in terms of staff capacity to fulfill the system-level functions?

Additional notes?

References and Next Steps

Based on your self-assessment of your staffing capacity strengths and areas for growth, Built for Zero may be able to support.

- **Role Clarity:** If your community would benefit from sharpening and formalizing who is responsible for what function, review the [BfZ Staffing Guide](#) to learn more about Champions vs. Coordinators and important considerations when scoping a position.
- **Capacity:** If your community would benefit from additional bandwidth to support your system-level functions, review the [BfZ Capacity-Building Investment FAQ](#) to explore possibilities to fund a system-building position in your community.
- **Training:** If your community staff would benefit from growing as system-builders and leaders, review our Training Roadmap guide (*coming soon!*) to learn more about training from our partners and peer networks
- **Sustainability:** If your community needs to bolster its funding sustainability, review our sustainability roadmap (*coming soon!*) to learn about how we plan to support your community in advocating for sustainable funding.

What are **two action items** that you could bring back to your community or discuss with your BfZ coach?

<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
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