

# Developing Organizational Capacity - Allan Kaplan

By Allan Kaplan. Community Development Resource Association.  
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## The goal is to BUILD AN ORGANIZATION with capacity

### **An organization with capacity:**

- Is an autonomous, self-aware entity that defines its own sources of inspiration, focus and direction
- Is able to learn from its experience
- Is able to respond with flexibility, innovation and adaptability to changing circumstances
- Has a strategic outlook that enables it to act decisively to impact and change its circumstances and social context
- Motivates, inspires and develops its members
- Concentrates on developing a *robust* capability
- Is sustainable - organized for the long haul, rather than for the capacity to perform a particular task at a specific time.

## The following steps, in sequence, build an organization with capacity

1. **Create a *shared* assessment, a *shared* conceptual framework of the organization's situation in the world.**  
Central to this is a [fearless] strategic assessment of power in society - in a historical context.
2. **Develop an organizational "attitude" (stance) and identity (sense of itself) which enables the organization to act confidently and effectively on the world.**  
The organization's identity must include awareness of its own strengths, its intended impact on its relationships with others and its intended impact on its context.

3. **Create a vision, an understanding of what the organization intends to do, by exploring internal and external constraints and possibilities.**  
There is a reality out there that must be responded to, and there is an inner inspiration that must be harnessed and focused.
4. **Develop a strategy - the “how” by which the organization intends to realize its vision.**  
Design a coherent methodology of practice which allows the organization to create and implement its strategy.
5. **Nurture an organizational culture with norms and values which are self-critical and self-reflective.**  
Organizational culture is formed by the norms and values that are practiced in an organization; the way of life in an organization; the way people interact in an organization; the way things are done in an organization.  
To build capacity, take the time needed to learn from successes and failures, to evaluate honestly, to become aware of strengths and weaknesses, to hone methodology and to sharpen the organization’s strategic edge.
6. **Structure the organization to suit its culture, implement its strategy and achieve its goals.**  
Once the organization’s aims, strategy and culture are clear, it becomes possible to structure the organization. ‘Form follows function’ - if one tries to do this the other way around, the organization becomes incapacitated.
7. **Take the time to develop the organization’s members and organizers - it is not enough to train them.**  
Encourage members and organizers to develop inner resourcefulness, creativity and a self-critical appreciation of their organization’s practice.  
  
*Unless organizational capacity has been developed sufficiently to harness training and the acquisition of new skills, training courses do not 'take', and skills do not adhere. An organization without a strategy, without a sense of responsibility for itself and without an adequate structure, cannot make use of training courses and skills acquisition. (Italics added)*
8. **When the organization faces a scarcity of material resources, harness organizational 'attitude' to overcome the scarcity.**  
To be capacitated, an organization needs material resources: finances, equipment, office space and so on. Careful utilization of scarce resources becomes capacitating.