



Common River: A Strategy for Organizational Capacity Building

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Introduction

Common River (CR) is a US-based 501(c)3 nonprofit public benefit organization that implements community development programs in Aleta Wondo, Ethiopia. According to the website, the organization's mission statement is "to empower the community to become balanced, productive and self-sustaining for others to witness and replicate, while honoring cultural heritage and environmental biodiversity."

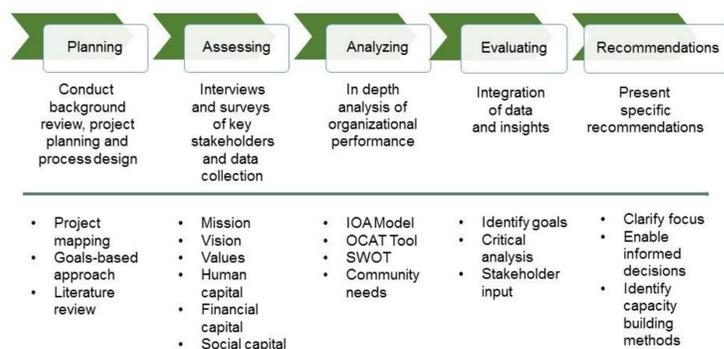
Using a collaborative approach with key stakeholders, current organizational challenges and goals were first identified. Next, an evaluation design was created to guide the process of assessing organizational performance. Once data was analyzed using an integrated approach, a series of recommendations were established to guide leadership in next steps.

Objectives

- Provide leadership with tools and guidance to make the best use of available resources.
- Clarify the CR leadership team's focus enabling them to make appropriate decisions about moving forward with strategic planning initiatives and capacity building efforts.
- Identify viable capacity building strategies that will best empower CR in effectively utilizing current assets to better align programs and services with their mission and community needs.

Methodology

An adaptation of MITRE's Organizational Assessment Approach was used for project mapping. Primary data was collected via expert interviews, program records and a detailed survey in conjunction with secondary data through a literature review.



Adapted from MITRE's Organizational Assessment Approach

Analysis

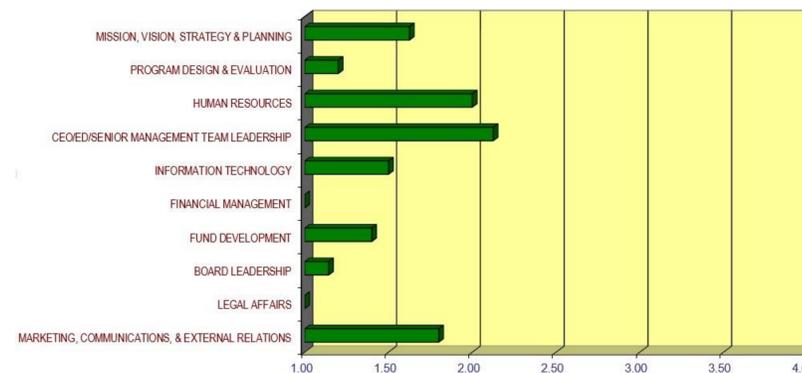
Research Questions:

- Is CR's mission statement still viable, relevant, and desirable?
- Is CR performing at their optimal level and in accordance with their stated mission, vision, and values?
- Is CR's current programming in alignment with their stated mission and values?
- How can CR build their capacity with limited resources?
- Is CR fully utilizing identified opportunities and strengths and how can they best address weaknesses and threats?

The analysis process included a multi-dimensional evaluation utilizing the **Universalia Institutional and Organizational Assessment (IOA) Model.**



Results from McKinsey's Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool (OCAT)



OCAT scores indicate strengths to build upon and areas to improve. The lower scores demonstrate a clear need for increased capacity while the higher scores reveal a high level of capacity. The results show that CR has room for improvement in the areas of financial management, board leadership and program design & evaluation. The highest score received was for their team leadership.

SWOT Analysis

The SWOT was developed utilizing primary and secondary data. Outcomes from the SWOT substantiated results from the other assessment mechanisms.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Robust participatory community based development 2. Rich history in Aleta Wondo 3. International cross-cultural exchange between beneficiaries and volunteers 4. Model of bottom up development 5. Significant asset of property in Ethiopia 6. Successful primary education program 7. Positive impact on local children's health through nutrition and access to services 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of funds, limited revenue sources, fundraising and development 2. Infrastructural problems at site 3. Limited capacity of local staff and language barrier 4. Challenges obtaining adequate program supplies 5. Imbalanced board participation 6. Inadequate building supplies 7. Environmental degradation
Opportunities	Threats
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Benefits from land use for farming including coffee, honey and agriculture 2. Advance eco-lodge and eco-tourism to create revenue stream 3. Capability for local and international collaboration in sustainable development 4. Potential for social enterprise to create revenue 5. Expand education program 6. Enhance outreach through community participation 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Organizational infrastructure challenges 2. Corrupt government 3. Lack of structured foundation for economic development 4. Weather instability 5. Government restrictions 6. Agrarian challenges related to region 7. Environmental degradation

Recommendations

Strategic Leadership

- Board development
 - Use bylaws and governing documents
 - Utilize resources such as BoardSource, CompassPoint, Taproot Foundation and Universities
 - Increase networks and employ cross-sector collaborations
- Mission / Vision / Values
 - Clearly stated and communicated
 - Ensure all programs align
- Intentional planning

Financial Management

- Implement accounting reporting system
- Adopt and execute an annual operating budget
- Facilitate staff training for basic accounting functions
- Generate fundraising and marketing plans
- Engage a CPA to conduct annual audits

Programs and Services

- Focus on what is working and further develop
- Optimize land revenue options
 - Coffee programs
 - Eco-lodge and eco-tourism programs
 - Explore agriculture related revenue streams other than coffee
 - Agriculture cooperatives
- Expand education program (school)
- Consider social enterprise opportunities

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