Nonprofit Capacity Building in Central New York

Assets, Needs & Opportunities

August, 2019

Nonprofit Capacity Building in Central New York
Assets, Needs & Opportunities

August, 2019

Prepared for:
Health Foundation for Western and Central New York

Prepared by:
Alice Carle, Project Director

In partnership with:
Jessica Bauer Walker
Renee Cadzow, Ph.D.

Summary

The Health Foundation for Western and Central New York (HFWCNY) commissioned the Center for Governmental Research (CGR) in partnership with the Community Health Worker Network of Buffalo (CHWNB) to conduct a study to identify the assets, needs, and gaps in capacity building resources for nonprofit organizations in Central New York.

The study included eight Central New York (CNY) counties (Cayuga, Cortland, Herkimer, Madison, Oneida, Onondaga, Oswego, and Tompkins) and is a replication of a study conducted in Western New York (WNY) for the Western New York Nonprofit Support Group[1].

This study included best-practice research, surveying, interviews and focus groups; with a strong focus on qualitative data. It was designed to draw on principles and practices from community-based participatory research, where the nonprofit community helped to frame the questions and framework of the study.

The funders and researchers adopted three guiding principles for the study:

- A **diversity, equity and inclusion** (DEI) orientation, both in our conceptualization of capacity building and in soliciting a broad band of nonprofit insights with a special emphasis on capturing and highlighting the voices of frequently marginalized groups that often do not have access to traditional philanthropy.

- An **asset-based approach** to the exploration of capacity building resources. Building capacity is at the core of asset-based community development, which is a community development framework that draws upon existing community strengths to build stronger, more sustainable communities (ABCD Institute, 2019). Thus, the team brought a strength-based lens to its exploration of capacity building resources, and brought the knowledge, experience, and insights of those working in nonprofit organizations into the co-construction of surveys, interview/focus group protocols and making sense of the data.

- An **iterative approach** to conducting the study with frequent communication and check-in points with stakeholders to explicitly call out opportunities to jointly discuss and shape the various elements of the study.

After reviewing relevant literature, the project team designed a capacity building framework, around which the survey, interview questions, focus groups were organized. The framework called out six main domains for capacity building -

---

[1] The Western New York Nonprofit Support Group (WNYNSG) is a foundation workgroup with a vision for a healthy nonprofit ecosystem in which organizations collaborate, learn, and innovate together to become more successful in delivering on their missions..

Resources; Alignment and Collaboration; Research, Evaluation and Strategic Learning (R/E/SL); Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI); Vision and Mission; and Leadership – that are commonly found in all organizations. Each of the components of the framework works at all three levels of the framework: individual, organization, and community.

Quantitative and qualitative data were then collected:

- To gather perspectives from nonprofits, surveys were sent to 587 nonprofit organizations in the eight-county region of Central New York. We received 86 responses for an overall response rate of 15%.
- To add texture and depth to the survey results, CGR conducted 20 interviews with 13 nonprofit leaders (12 executives and 1 board member), 4 funders, and 3 nonprofit network and hub leaders.
- In addition, CHWNB conducted six focus groups (in Auburn, Cortland, Ithaca, Syracuse, Oswego and Utica) to engage in a joint conversation about capacity building needs and assets and to supplement with data and voices not captured in surveys or interviews. In all, 88 people participated in focus groups across CNY.

After analyzing the variety of data collected, the project team created an interactive Asset Map (discussed later in this report and presented in an accompanying document) showing assets and gaps/needs in each of the six capacity building domains, and described overall findings in this report.

Survey findings

Share of CNY organizations with challenges by domain
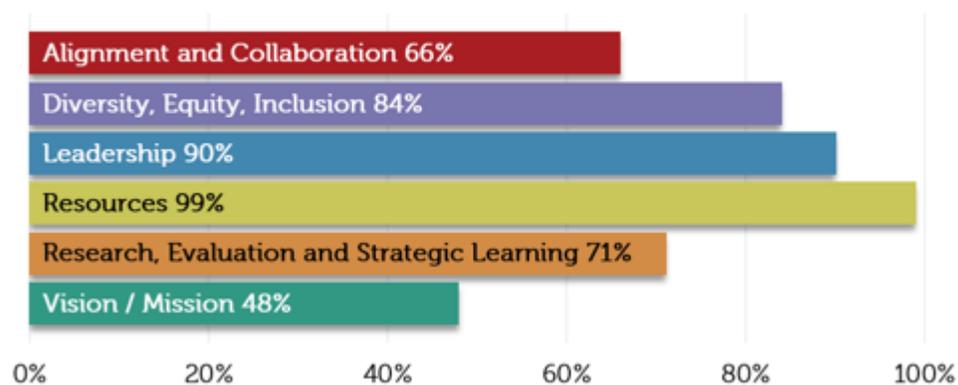
Domain	Percentage
Alignment and Collaboration	66%
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion	84%
Leadership	90%
Resources	99%
Research, Evaluation and Strategic Learning	71%
Vision / Mission	48%

- Survey participants felt strongest in the areas of Vision and Mission and Alignment and Collaboration and named Resources as the domain with the most challenges and need for support.

- Within the Resources domain, survey respondents identified fundraising and development functions, forecasting changes to the funding landscape, and human resources as key challenges and priorities for external support.

- Challenges related to Leadership were next most common (in particular, board governance, work/life balance, and the leadership pipeline), followed by DEI (particularly recruiting and retaining diverse staff and board) and Research, Evaluation, and Strategic Learning where organizations lifted up struggles with measuring, evaluating, and understanding the value of their programs and services.

These initial survey findings generally align with national findings on needs in the nonprofit sector.[2] They also generally align with findings in the WNY study; however, CNY respondents consistently listed higher rates of challenge than WNY in every DEI category perhaps because of a heightened awareness of these issues due to a concerted push among some local funders and intermediaries.

The top six challenges named in the survey for both CNY and WNY are listed below.

CNY Rank	Domain	Question	% moderate or serious challenge	WNY	WNY Rank
1	Resources	Fundraising and development to support org priorities	88%	92%	1
2	Resources	Forecasting changes to the funding landscape/capitalizing on new revenue sources	83%	89%	2
3	DEI	Recruiting/retaining diverse staff and board members	76%	64%	5
4	Leadership	Board governance	65%	66%	4
5	Leadership	Finding ways to maintain work life balance/prevent burnout	65%	63%	6
6	Resources	Human resources	64%	67%	3

Interviews and focus groups

Interviews and focus groups gave added depth to these findings and helped provide better understanding of nonprofit capacity building assets, gaps, and needs in each of the six domains.

A key observation among the researchers was a marked richness in geographic cultures that was different from our experiences in WNY. While there was certainly overlap across the CNY focus groups, participants in each focus group also emphasized different themes and assets in relation to their communities including

---

[2] Camper, Naomi. Aspen Institute, *A Strong Nonprofit Sector is Key to Thriving Communities.* (2016) https://www.aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/a-strong-nonprofit-sector-is-key-to-thriving-communities/

strong capacity building support by local foundations, fairly mature cross-sector networking, engagement and collaborative opportunities and practices, some expansive thinking about working across sectors and disciplines, a strong community-driven community building project and a concerted focus on advancing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) principles and practices among nonprofit organizations.

Gaps/needs discussed in each of the domains are as follows:

- In Resources, the need for unrestricted funding, the relative lack of private funding sources in some regions; support for fundraising, human resources and financial management functions; recruiting qualified staff and paying competitive wages; and volunteer management were highlighted.

- Gaps and needs in Alignment and Collaboration center on having time and resources to collaborate, collaborating in an authentic way, more expansive networking opportunities and infrastructure in some counties, the ability to work across sectors, organizing and co-producing with community, and the need for policy advocacy.

- In Research, Evaluation and Strategic Learning, key gaps are infrastructure for data management, the ability to use data for strategic learning, streamlined reporting, and continued support for those going through VBP transitions.

- In Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, leaders discussed challenges with recruiting and retaining diverse staff and board members and raised the need for additional DEI trainings and resources.

- In Vision and Mission, nonprofit leaders discussed the challenges of staying true to their missions when funding priorities change and managing to their strategic plans.

- In Leadership, gaps and needs included succession planning, leadership development, achieving work/life balance, board recruitment and board management,

Rural organizations highlighted some unique challenges including technology related to high-speed internet and information technology resources, board and staff recruiting and succession planning, and an unwillingness of funders that prioritize impacting as many people as possible to invest in rural areas due to scale (where costs per participant are unavoidably higher).

Smaller organizations had many of the same organizational challenges as the rest of the nonprofit community, but were more likely to lift up challenges with vision and mission articulation, strategic planning, board recruitment. They also mentioned succession planning (especially if the executive is the organization's founder), data infrastructure, information technology and volunteer management.

Newer and younger organizations named similar challenges as small organizations, including vision/mission articulation, strategic planning and not being valued for their knowledge and expertise.

Organizations serving special populations were more likely to lift up their DEI policies as a strength.

Overarching themes and opportunities

Promote regional learning/sharing across CNY

There may be an untapped opportunity in CNY to help build and foster a regional learning community. In WNY, it appears that more work needs to be done on making cross-sector connections within the specific geographies (with some urban-rural connections mixed in); whereas CNY appears to have some established capacity with this, thereby potentially positioning it for a more regional approach. This capacity may have been bolstered by some funders that have provided innovative capacity building support and by some non-traditional/cross-sector coalitions. This may also be because Syracuse is a smaller city than Buffalo and Rochester and the only large city in the CNY region. Smaller cities/town/rural regions have to collaborate to survive, and have more proximity to each other. In fact, focus group participants consistently felt that the size of their communities is an asset because it makes it easier to collaborate.

For example, DEI may be particularly ripe for a regional approach. Survey respondents consistently named all aspects of DEI as a challenge at higher rates than WNY, perhaps because of a heightened awareness of these issues due to a concerted push among some local funders and intermediaries, and there are several providers of DEI tools and trainings throughout the region. There may be an opportunity to talk about how to leverage these resources regionally to ensure cost-effective broad coverage.

Continued support for collaborative infrastructure across counties to help foster relationships

CNY appears to be home to a number of collaborative structures (networks, forums, formal partnerships) that were built meaningfully and intentionally and that advance the trust and connection needed to make meaningful change. However, some participants, specifically those in Cortland and Cayuga counties, mentioned the lack of some support structures, such as a non-profit council, leading to fewer opportunities to nurture relationships. Even within counties with these type of supporting organizations, there was still a call for more expansive partnerships and collaboratives that include organizations of multiple disciplines and sizes. An assessment of and support for opportunities for organizations to connect can help to foster stronger relationships (especially for organizations working with marginalized communities) more learning, and ultimately more creative solutions.

Provide and advocate for flexible funding

Nonprofits throughout CNY consistently raised issues around the inflexibility and high demands of government funding including pre-determined staffing qualifications and training, demanding reporting requirements and restrictions on how funds can be used. This inflexibility keeps organizations from doing many of the things that are important to the overall capacity of a nonprofit's operations including investing in leadership development, fundraising infrastructure, IT, marketing, and strategic use of data. Private philanthropy has the ability to be more flexible with its funding and help fill these gaps for individual organizations through targeted funding for core operational costs or through unrestricted, multi-year support.

Acknowledgements

CGR and the Community Health Network of Buffalo (CHWNB) are immensely grateful to the study's Advisory Committee members – Danielle Gill, Amie Hendrix, Lindsay McClung, Kara Williams, Loretta Zolkowski, and Rebecca Bostwick. Their insights and community connections were crucial to guiding this study and capturing perspectives from a diverse range of nonprofit agencies.

We would also like to thank focus group hosts: ACR Health, Cayuga Community Health Network, InterFaith Works, Oswego County Opportunities, Seven Valleys Health Coalition, and Tompkins County Human Services Coalition. Each host helped identify a diverse range of focus group participants and provided space for nonprofit leaders to gather and discuss their capacity building needs and the assets available to them.

We want to recognize Nora OBrien-Suric, Ph.D., and Marnie Annese and with the Health Foundation for Western and Central New York for supporting this project and for their commitment of time and efforts in the iterative nature of this work.

We want to acknowledge Barbara J. Zappia, Ed.D., whose leadership and vision shaped this study from the beginning.

Finally, CGR and CHWNB are grateful to each of the nonprofit leaders who gave generously of their time to complete a survey, be interviewed or participate in focus group. This report would not have been possible without their candid feedback and insight. The level of commitment, knowledge and energy that nonprofit organizations demonstrate in support of Central New York and its people was impressive and inspiring to us.

Staff Team

Alice Carle and Zohar Perla led this project for CGR, supported by data analysis from Michael Silva, technology support from Katherine Bell, and additional data support from CGR Intern David Skrill.

Jessica Bauer Walker led this project on behalf of the Community Health Worker Network of Buffalo. Renee Cadzow, Ph.D. contributed her expertise in mixed methods research, Dayatra Hassan assisted with focus group facilitation and Erin Verhoef provided administrative support for the focus group process.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Nonprofit organizations play a vital role in contributing to the social, physical, economic and environmental health of our communities. Yet, nonprofits are being asked to do more with less in an era of growing needs and shrinking resources. Indeed, slightly more than half of focus group participants in this study disagreed with the statement "I have the resources I need to manage my organization without too much trouble most days."

This study is designed to gather nonprofit leaders' perspectives on both the needs of the nonprofit sector in Central New York and the assets that are available to support it. This report will outline:

1. The study background and methodology

2. The capacity building framework designed to guide the study

3. Reflections on our experiences in the field

4. A set of overarching ideas for discussion

Background

The Health Foundation for Western and Central New York (HFWCNY) commissioned the Center for Governmental Research (CGR) in partnership with the Community Health Worker Network of Buffalo (CHWNB) to conduct a study to identify the assets and needs and gaps in capacity building resources for nonprofit organizations in Central New York (CNY). The study is a replication of a study conducted in Western New York for the Western New York Nonprofit Support Group[3].

The goals of the study are to identify:

CNY counties included in the study:
- Cayuga
- Cortland
- Herkimer
- Madison
- Oneida
- Onondaga
- Oswego
- Tompkins

- The needs among nonprofit agencies and community organizations in Central New York for capacity building support, particularly among organizations in

---

[3] The Western New York Nonprofit Support Group (WNYNSG) is a foundation workgroup with a vision for a healthy nonprofit ecosystem in which organizations collaborate, learn, and innovate together to become more successful in delivering on their missions.

rural areas and smaller, grassroots, community-based organizations not previously engaged by local foundations.

- The assets currently available to support nonprofit capacity building.

- The nonprofit community's perspective on where additional capacity building assistance is most needed, and how to build on existing strengths and assets.

Guiding principles

The funders and researchers jointly adopted a set of principles to guide the study from the outset.

First, the study was designed to have a **diversity, equity and inclusion**[4] (DEI) orientation, both in its conceptualization of capacity building and in soliciting a broad band of nonprofit insights with a special emphasis on capturing and highlighting the voices of frequently marginalized groups that often do not have access to traditional philanthropy.

Second, we adopted an **asset-based approach** to the exploration of capacity building resources. Building capacity is at the core of asset-based community development, which is a community development framework that draws upon existing community strengths to build stronger, more sustainable communities (ABCD Institute, 2019). Thus, the team brought a strength-based lens to its exploration of capacity building resources, and brought the knowledge, experience, and insights of those working in nonprofit organizations into the co-construction of surveys, interview/focus group protocols and making sense of the data.

Finally, we jointly acknowledged the **iterative** nature of the work and deliberately built in communication strategies and check-in points with stakeholders to explicitly call out opportunities to jointly discuss and shape the various elements of the study.

---

[4] Independent Sector defines diversity, equity and inclusion as follows: *Diversity* includes all the ways in which people differ, encompassing the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. *Equity* is individuals and organizations giving fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups. Improving equity involves increasing justice and fairness within the procedures and processes of institutions or systems, as well as in their distribution of resources. Tackling equity issues requires an understanding of the root causes of outcome disparities within our society. *Inclusion* is the act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences and offers respect in words and actions for all people. https://independentsector.org/resource/why-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-matter/

Project partners

The Community Health Network of Buffalo (CHWNB) was subcontracted under CGR to help lead this study. Team members brought their expertise in group facilitation and grassroots organizing. They contributed an asset-based lens, strong community ties, and a keen focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion essential to this study, as well as expertise around community-based participatory research/participatory action research.

We also formed an Advisory Committee to review data collection tools and to help ensure a process that supported diversity, equity, inclusion, accountability, transparency. Committee members included:

- Danielle Gill, Director of Community Grantmaking, Central New York Community Foundation
- Amie M. Hendrix, Deputy County Administrator, Tompkins County
- Lindsay McClung, Director of Community Grantmaking, The Gifford Foundation
- Kara Williams, Director of Strategic Initiatives, Allyn Family Foundation
- Loretta Zolkowski, Executive Director, Human Services Leadership Council
- Rebecca Bostwick, Consultant

Finally, participant organizations and nonprofit leaders across Central New York contributed significant time, support and expertise to this project. From time spent taking surveys, giving feedback in interviews, and attending focus groups, the breadth and depth of our work was greatly enhanced by the local nonprofit community's willingness to share their expansive knowledge and experience with us.

Data collection

This study included best-practice research, surveying, interviews and focus groups; with a strong focus on qualitative data and drawing on principles and practices from community-based participatory research, where the nonprofit community helped to frame the questions and framework of the study.

Best practice research. The project team engaged in best-practice research and a literature review of nonprofit capacity building and asset mapping before engaging in data collection. A capacity building framework was designed, around which a survey, interview questions, focus groups were organized (see page 5).

Organizational survey. Surveys were sent to 587 nonprofit organizations in the eight-county region of central New York. We received 86 responses for an overall response rate of 15%. A more detailed discussion of the survey methodology appears in Appendix B.

Interviews. CGR conducted 20 interviews with 13 nonprofit leaders (12 executives and 1 board member), 4 funders, and 3 nonprofit network and hub leaders to gather additional perspectives and more deeply understand their views on capacity building needs and assets. Interview candidates were identified by the Project's Advisory Committee. We intentionally selected interviewees to present a diversity of perspectives in terms of organizational location and size. Of the 13 nonprofit organizations interviewed, 6 were small, 7 were large; 5 were urban and 4 served rural areas and 4 served both urban and rural.

Focus groups. Finally, CHWNB conducted six focus groups (in Auburn, Cortland, Ithaca, Syracuse, Oswego and Utica) to engage in a joint conversation about capacity building needs and assets and to supplement with data and voices not captured in surveys or interviews. Sites were selected intentionally to ensure that there was adequate representation from both urban and rural communities, as well as across the geography of the Central New York region, and to include nonprofit leadership ranging from small (grassroots and voluntary organizations) to large (multi-million dollar multi-service organizations). Advisory Committee members and focus group hosts helped to ensure that diverse voices were invited to the conversation. In all, 88 people participated in focus groups across Central New York. A more detailed discussion of focus group appears in Appendix C.

Capacity Building Framework

To guide this study, we adopted the following definitions:

- *Capacity* is a wide range of capabilities, knowledge and resources that nonprofits need in order to be effective.[5]

- *Capacity building*, as defined by Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO), is "the funding and technical assistance to help nonprofits increase specific capacities to deliver stronger programs, take risks, build connections, innovate and iterate.[6] Capacity building needs to be tailored to the ability or "readiness" of the nonprofit to engage.

- Adopting another GEO definition, *technical assistance*, is "the process by which organizations obtain the necessary knowledge, tools and other resources to develop, implement and assess targeted improvements in their work; this process is often supported by a consultant or expert." This term is often used interchangeably with capacity building.[7]

In addition, CGR and CHWNB jointly created a capacity building framework. In developing this framework, we read and adapted materials from other sources such as the Urban Institute,[8] GEO, and the TCC group.[9] We reinforced existing models with a greater emphasis on diversity, equity and inclusion, turning to information from the Leadership Learning Community for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.[10] Further, we brought to this process our value for asset-based community development[11] and the importance of engaging with community.

Our capacity framework is visualized below.

---

[5]A Funder's Guide to Organizational Assessment, GEO and Fieldstone Alliance, (2005)
[6] *Strengthening Nonprofit Capacity*, Grantmakers for Effective Philanthropy (2016)
https://philanthropynewyork.org/sites/default/files/resources/geo_2016_strengtheningnonprofitcapacity.pdf
[7] *Strengthening Nonprofit Capacity,* Grantmakers for Effective Philanthropy (2016)
[8] DeVita, Carol and Cory Flemming, *Building Capacity in Nonprofit Organizations.* Urban Institute (2001)
http://research.urban.org/UploadedPDF/building_capacity.PDF
[9] *Capacity Building 3.0*, TCC Group. https://www.tccgrp.com/resource/capacity-building-3-0-how-to-strengthen-the-social-ecosystem/
[10] Leadership Learning Community, *Developing a Racial Justice and Leadership Framework to Promote Racial Equity* (2009)
http://leadershiplearning.org/system/files/Racial%20Equity%20and%20Leadership%20Scan.pdf
[11] Information on asset-based community development can be found at
https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/Pages/default.aspx
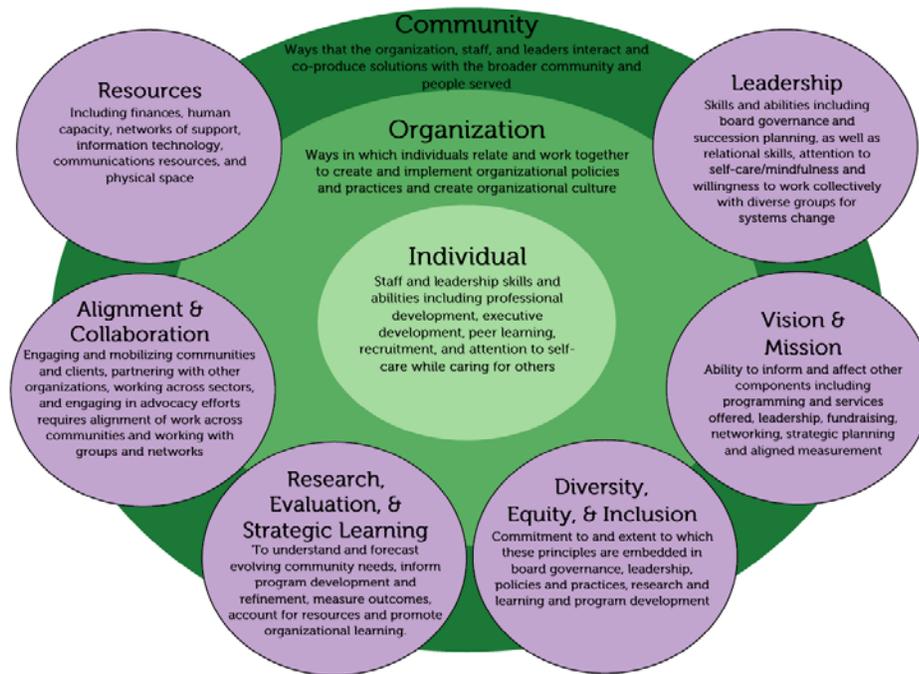
The framework is comprised of six domains (resources; alignment and collaboration; research, evaluation and strategic learning; diversity, equity, and inclusion; vision and mission; and leadership) that are commonly found in all organizations. The domains function as a system, with each domain reinforcing and bolstering the others. Each can be seen as an intervention point for enhancing organizational capacity.

For more detail on each domain of the capacity building framework, see Appendix A.

Reflections from the field

All told, CGR and CHWNB touched a broad array of nonprofits in Central New York through this study and upon reflection, came away with several insights:

Balancing needs and assets

This study was specifically designed to take an asset-based approach to capacity building and has lifted up many assets that may have been overlooked in prior studies of the Central New York nonprofit landscape that have largely focused on deficits.

This asset-based orientation was initially counter-intuitive to many study participants, due to the considerable organizational and community challenges nonprofits face on a daily basis, and the fact that a significant part of nonprofit leaders' jobs involve

demonstrating needs in order to obtain resources for their work. Thoughtful facilitation and carefully framed research questions and processes were required to draw out assets and strengths, while validating and capturing the very real gaps and needs that nonprofit organizations are experiencing as well.

Qualitative data matters

This study highlighted the limitations of surveys and the data they provide. While the survey results helped create an initial take on the material, the interviews and focus groups helped to provide a more nuanced understanding of nonprofit needs and assets. We relied on our study team's expertise in culling data from stories, and overlaying qualitative and quantitative data. Additionally, the methodology and design of the focus groups, utilizing community-based participatory research principles and practices, led to immediately available and useful connections that participants reported as empowering, with useful applications to their work.

Diversity, equity and inclusion takes work

Significant time and energy was spent on ensuring focus groups in particular were diverse and supported equity, inclusion and access. Despite these efforts, some focus groups had a lack of racial diversity and/or of participation by smaller/grassroots organizations. In some of these groups, participants acknowledged that this lack of diversity among non-profit leadership was not reflective of the diverse communities they serve. Rural organizations and leaders appreciated the intention to ensure they were included, and that several rural sites were made available for focus groups. There were also promising practices shared by many non-profit leaders and their communities that very intentionally worked to build diversity, equity and inclusion into their work.

Desire for results, action and next steps

Study participants are very interested in learning the results of the study and are eager to engage in discussion about the findings and what may come next, including ability to dialogue directly with the foundation about the study results.

Richness in geographic cultures

Focus group participants in CNY lifted a variety of themes, assets, and challenges unique to their communities. While there was certainly overlap, there seemed to be a strong sense of intact communities and strong relationships in each region. While not an exhaustive list of assets, some examples in this variability included:

- Model capacity building **funder practices** among several foundations working in Cayuga, Onondaga, Madison, Herkimer, and Oneida counties, including support for core operations, strategic planning, deep dive organizational analyses, leadership development, and modeling trust-based philanthropy.

- Interesting **cross-sector networking, engagement and collaborative** opportunities and practices such as a multi-sector civic roundtable program in Auburn and a center for cross-cultural dialog, and a nonprofit "hub" with multiple nonprofit tenants in Syracuse.

- Participants in Ithaca and Oswego modeled **expansive thinking** and lifted up the importance of working across sectors. For example, they discussed strong connections with the arts and culture community and understanding that arts and culture are human services and integral to promoting the health and well-being of people and communities.

- Participants in the Oswego/Fulton-area lifted up a strong **community-building** project that has engaged in an asset-based model of volunteerism and support from residents, non-profit organizations and business to spur economic development and revitalization.

- Concerted focus on **advancing DEI** principles and practices among nonprofits by foundations in CNY and intermediaries like the Human Services Leadership Council. In Syracuse and Ithaca in particular, focus group members used a strong equity lens and talked about the work that has been done in this space and how much work still is required. While structural racism was not explicitly called out, many issues related to DEI were.

Overarching themes and opportunities

Promote regional learning/sharing across CNY

Given this richness among the CNY counties, there may be an untapped resource in CNY in terms of a regional learning community. In WNY, it appears that more work needs to be done on making cross-sector connections within the specific geographies (with some urban-rural connections mixed in); whereas CNY appears to have some established capacity for a more regional approach. This may have been bolstered by some funders that have provided innovative capacity building support and by some non-traditional/cross-sector coalitions. This may also be because Syracuse is a smaller city than Buffalo and Rochester and the only large city in the CNY region. Smaller

cities/town/rural regions have to collaborate to survive, and have more proximity to each other. In fact, focus group participants consistently felt that the size of their communities is an asset because it makes it easier to collaborate.

Any of the assets mentioned above (model funder practices, nonprofit collaborative practices, expansive thinking and networking, community building, DEI) are potential areas for a regional approach to sharing and learning. For example, DEI may be particularly ripe for a regional approach. Survey respondents consistently named all aspects of DEI as a challenge at higher rates than WNY, perhaps because of a heightened awareness of these issues, and there are several providers of DEI tools and trainings throughout the region. There may be an opportunity to talk about how to leverage these resources regionally to ensure cost-effective broad coverage.

Continued support for collaborative infrastructure across counties

CNY appears to be home to a number of collaborative structures (networks, forums, formal partnerships) that were built meaningfully and intentionally and that advance the trust and connection needed to make meaningful change. However, some participants, specifically those in Cortland and Cayuga counties, mentioned the lack of some support structures, such as a non-profit council, leading to fewer opportunities to nurture relationships. Even within counties with these types of supporting organizations, there was still a call for more expansive partnerships and collaboratives that include organizations of multiple disciplines and sizes. An assessment of and support for opportunities for organizations to connect can help to foster stronger relationships, especially for organizations working with marginalized communities, more learning, and ultimately more creative solutions.

Flexible funding

Nonprofits throughout CNY consistently raised issues around the inflexibility and high demands of government funding including pre-determined staffing qualifications and training, demanding reporting requirements and restrictions on how funds can be used. This inflexibility keeps organizations from doing many of the things that are important to the overall capacity of a nonprofit's operations including investing in leadership development, fundraising infrastructure, information technology, marketing, and strategic use of data. Private philanthropy has the ability to be more flexible with its funding and help fill these gaps for individual organizations through targeted funding for core operational costs or through unrestricted, multi-year support.

cgr Promising Solutions

Findings

To help illustrate the broad range of assets and gaps needs identified through this study, we created an interactive **Asset Map**. The asset map is designed to present a comprehensive picture of the assets and gaps/needs for each of the six domains identified in the capacity building framework.

The relative size of the gap/need space for each domain is reflective of the relative level of need expressed by respondents to the organizational survey. The relative size of individual assets and gap/needs captured on the map are also roughly reflective of their level of importance as expressed by study participants across surveys, interviews, and focus groups.
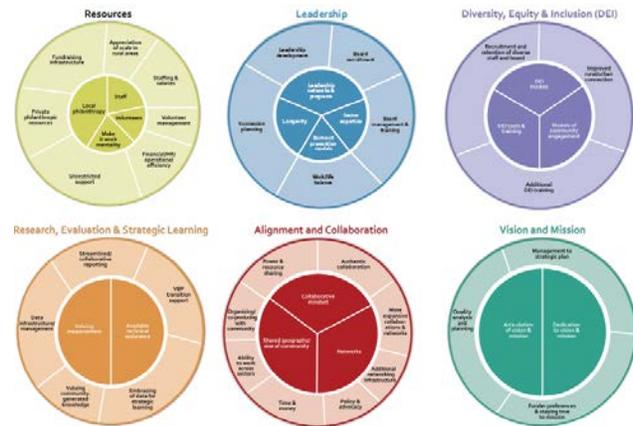
The assets and gaps/needs described in the map represent the general responses over multiple counties; the degree to which each asset and gap/need is applicable in each county varies somewhat. A discussion of this variability appears in the "Reflections from the field" section of this report.

As the map illustrates, while organizational leaders participating in all phases of the study identified assets and gaps/needs in each of the six domains, survey participants felt strongest in the areas of Vision and Mission and Alignment and Collaboration and weakest in Resources.

In the organizational survey, the Resources domain was highlighted as the area with the most challenges and in need of the most support. Within the Resources domain, fundraising and development functions, forecasting changes to the funding landscape, and communications and marketing were mentioned most often as key challenges followed by communications and marketing and obtaining/maintaining IT. Fundraising/development and communications/marketing were the number one and three priorities for external support respectively.

Share of CNY organizations with challenges by domain
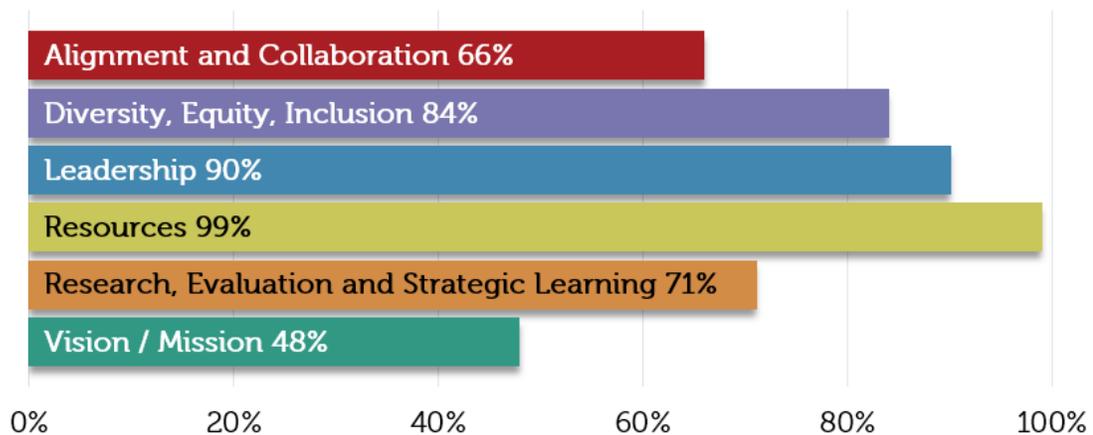
Challenges related to Leadership were next most common (in particular, board governance, work/life balance, and the leadership pipeline), followed by DEI (particularly recruiting and retaining diverse staff and board, which was named as the second most priority area in need of external support) and Research, Evaluation, and Strategic Learning.

Survey respondents cited fewer challenges with Alignment & Collaboration and Vision & Mission and were more likely to hold up elements of those domains as organizational strengths.

These initial survey findings generally align with national findings on needs in the nonprofit sector.[12] They also generally align with findings in the WNY study; however, CNY respondents consistently listed higher rates of challenge than WNY in every DEI category. See appendix B for a more detailed discussion of survey results.

The top six challenges for both CNY and WNY are listed below.

---

[12] Camper, Naomi. Aspen Institute, *A Strong Nonprofit Sector is Key to Thriving Communities.* (2016) https://www.aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/a-strong-nonprofit-sector-is-key-to-thriving-communities/

CNY Rank	Domain	Question	% moderate or serious challenge	WNY	WNY Rank
1	Resources	Fundraising and development to support org priorities	88%	92%	1
2	Resources	Forecasting changes to the funding landscape/capitalizing on new revenue sources	83%	89%	2
3	DEI	Recruiting/retaining diverse staff and board members	76%	64%	5
4	Leadership	Board governance	65%	66%	4
5	Leadership	Finding ways to maintain work life balance/prevent burnout	65%	63%	6
6	Resources	Human resources	64%	67%	3

While the organizational survey provides a general picture of nonprofit strengths, challenges and needs in Central New York, we cannot claim that they represent the Central New York nonprofit sector as a whole, nor do they provide much nuance in terms of the particular struggles of organizations and the types of assistance that would be helpful. The interviews and focus groups gave added depth and richness to these findings and helped provide better understanding of nonprofit capacity building assets, gaps, and needs in each of the six domains.

Below, we provide a high-level discussion of the assets and gaps/needs identified as well as preliminary suggestions for action for each of the capacity building domains. In addition to this report, **we recommend that readers interact with the** Asset Map **directly to get a more nuanced understanding of the assets nonprofits bring as well as the challenges they face and the connections between them.**

Resources

Includes finances, human capacity and resources, networks of support, information technology, communications, and physical space.

Resources

Assets

Nonprofit leaders in CNY name several assets related to the Resources domain, including dedicated and passionate **staff** and **volunteers** and an all-around **"get it done" mentality** in the face of scarce resources.

Most notably, Central New York is home to several **foundations leading the way in providing capacity building support** through direct funding for things like infrastructure costs, risk capital, and strategic business planning, and through sponsored programs for leadership development, board management and performance management. In fact, non-profit leaders in all CNY focus groups saw at least one foundation as an ally and partner in the work, and had a contact there that they described as mutually beneficial and supportive. Taken together, these are powerful supports for organizations within these foundations' programmatic and geographic priorities. This finding differs from WNY where organizations mentioned philanthropic generosity as an asset, but did not lift up a strong capacity building support ethos among funders; rather they put more emphasis on boards of directors and local businesses as additional assets.
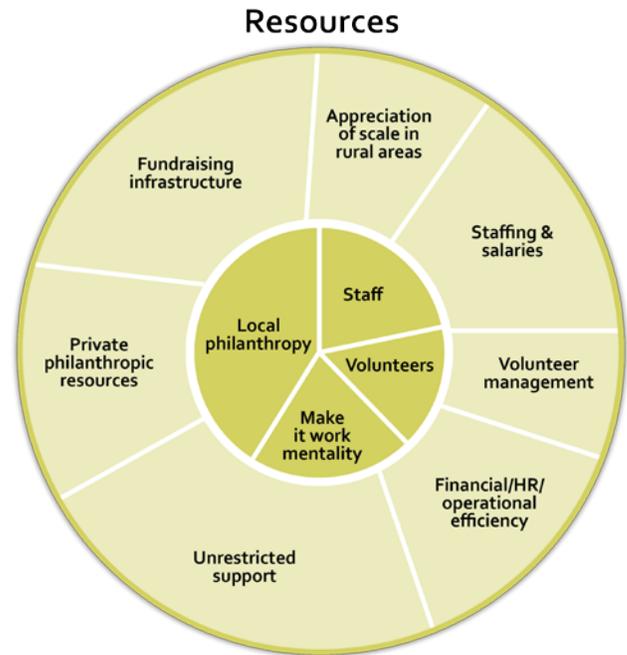
Gaps/Needs

Nonprofit organizations identified multiple needs related to the Resources domain, and there was consensus across all elements of the study that this was the domain with the highest level of need.

Private philanthropic resources

While nonprofit leaders lifted up the great capacity building work that several CNY foundations are providing, they acknowledged that most of these foundations have limited geographical catchment areas, leaving gaps in some counties for this type of support. In addition, leaders explained that the region overall is contracting with few major corporations and declining individual donations leading to significant competition for funding in places like Cortland County and others.

Unrestricted Support

Organizations highlighted a great need for unrestricted support, multi-year funding, and overhead/core operations, particularly those receiving highly restrictive government funding. They noted that their financial restrictions were often the most important limiting factor for organizational growth, innovation, and capacity building across all of the capacity building domains described in this study. This is an issue across the national nonprofit landscape, and impacts small, grassroots and other "frontline" organizations disproportionately (those serving special/marginalized populations, urban core and rural organizations, etc.).

Fundraising and other organizational infrastructure

Nonprofit leaders, particularly those from smaller and minority-serving organizations and those historically dependent on government funding, cited challenges in their ability to sufficiently build out their fundraising and development functions, including hiring development staff, accessing external assistance, and utilizing and purchasing appropriate development software. Fundraising and development to support organizational priorities was the number one organizational challenge listed by all survey participants and the number one area in need of support.

Nonprofit leaders also lifted up a need for assistance with financial management, human resources (particularly among small and mid-sized organizations), and organizational efficiency citing lack of funds and difficulty in finding skilled employees in these areas.

Marketing/communications was the third highest priority for external support among survey participants but unlike in WNY, was mentioned infrequently in interviews and focus groups. Similarly, IT was the 6th highest priority for external support among survey participants but not raised frequently in qualitative discussions. When IT was raised, it came primarily from rural organizations and those struggling with the need for sophisticated data for evaluation and learning needs.

Staffing

Nonprofit leaders are keenly aware of and sensitive to issues around the ability to find qualified staff, and pay a competitive wage. Higher minimum wage laws, rising healthcare costs, fairly flat grant amounts, and continually changing credential requirements at the state level all are putting pressure on nonprofits' ability to recruit, pay and retain qualified staff. Leaders in rural areas are particularly sensitive to these issues.

Volunteer management

Nonprofits cited challenges with both being an all-volunteer agency and managing volunteers in organization that have staff. Challenges include being taken seriously by funders, overuse and over-reliance on volunteers, as well as difficulty optimally deploying them.

Scale in rural areas

Nonprofit leaders in rural areas identified a challenge in communicating the differences in scale to urban funders and attracting their interest in working in their communities. In particular, they highlighted that the lower population density, decentralization of services, and lack of transportation often result in higher program costs per person to achieve the levels of impact seen in urban areas.

Alignment & Collaboration

Engaging and mobilizing communities and clients, partnering with other organizations, working across sectors, and engaging in advocacy efforts requires alignment of work across communities and working with groups and networks

Alignment and Collaboration

Assets

Organizational leaders in CNY, like WNY, find a deep value in aligning and collaborating and have the **collaborative mindset** to do it. In the organizational survey, respondents ranked "collaborating with other organizations" and "sharing and learning from peers" as the first and third areas of strength respectively.

While not mentioned as broadly or as frequently in WNY, organizational leaders in multiple CNY geographies feel that the **size of their communities** is an asset because it makes it easier to collaborate. Communities in CNY, they say, are large enough to have resources but small enough where people know each other and can navigate relationships with other organizations.

Nonprofits rely on **networks** and other types of **collaborative infrastructure**, both formal and informal, to identify partners, help stay abreast of critical industry issues,
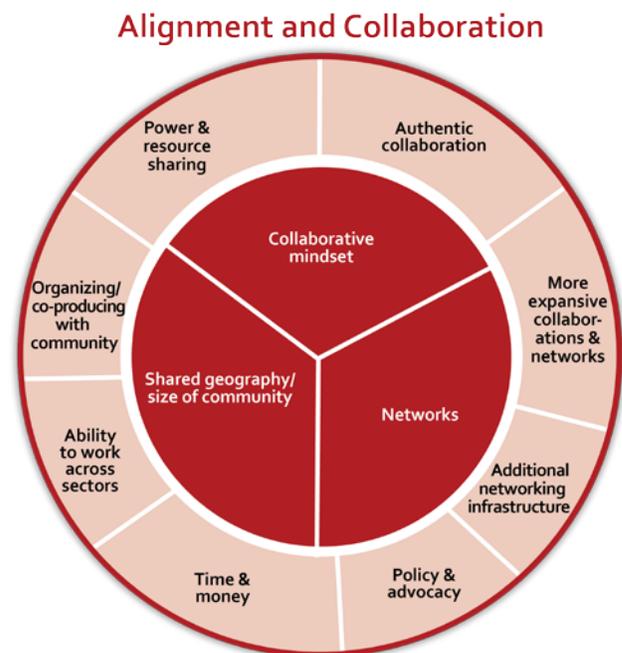
and to keep apprised of advocacy and funding opportunities. Networks come in a variety of structures and sizes: examples include local CEO groups, local councils and coalitions, and discipline-specific state and national associations. Informal networks tend to be built on personal relationships and connections and are critical to under-resourced communities (urban core and rural) in particular. CNY appears to have a number of networks and collaborative structures that were built meaningfully and intentionally with a focus on a shared vision for the larger community.

Gaps/Needs

Time and money

Organizations often mentioned the need for time and financial resources to make alignment and collaboration work well. Time is needed to establish trusting relationships and staff is often overwhelmed with the day-to-day work of running their organizations to dedicate the time needed to work externally. Financial support is needed to support the administrative costs associated with collaboration. The process of collaboration is resource and time-intensive enough that it often does not save them money, though it might result in stronger programming or results. Unfunded mandates to collaborate and some grantmakers' preference for one-year grants can come into conflict with the long-term, emergent nature of collaborative efforts. Properly capitalizing collaboration with core support as well as funds to cover expenses associated with convening, administration and assessment will provide organizations with the time needed to create authentic and successful collaborations.

Authentic collaboration among organizations

While CNY appears to have a strong commitment to and experience with collaboration, nonprofits can still encounter challenges in engaging in authentic partnerships in which organizations are less territorial, willing to change, and able to manage disagreement. In addition, funder requirements for collaboration can feel like "forced collaboration" when there is insufficient shared understanding and trust among the partners.

Organizational leaders also called out the power imbalances among organizations of different sizes and organizations of color, stating that often the larger, more well-known, more institutional organizations control the conversation, the work, and often, the money.

More expansive collaborations and networking opportunities

Similarly, while organizations feel that collaboration is one of their strengths and that the geographic size of the CNY communities made it easier to know and identify potential partners than other areas of the state, leaders felt that there is room to be more expansive and inclusive in their networks and partnerships. Participants in Ithaca

suggested expanding to arts, culture and humanities organizations, while others mentioned deliberately expanding to include grass-roots organizations and churches.

Additional networking infrastructure

While CNY leaders rely on many networks, both formal and informal, and identify these networks as assets, some nonprofit leaders -- specifically those in Cayuga County and Cortland County -- identified a need for formal nonprofit intermediaries to help coordinate and facilitate alignment and collaboration opportunities as well as increase communication across sectors in Syracuse.

Ability to work across sectors

CNY leaders identified several challenges in working with other sectors such as health care, education, and government, citing lack of buy-in, calcified systems, and rigid rules. Funders can help bring willing partners to the table to help participants translate sector-specific language and jargon, clear policy/regulatory hurdles, get clear about what success looks like for each sector and create shared outcome measures that are relevant, yet stretch the goals of the different sectors and disciplines involved.

Organizing and co-producing with community

Nonprofit leaders highlighted that levels of community engagement vary, and indicated that few organizations are authentically co-producing with their local communities and clients.

Grassroots organizations typically have a deep level of knowledge and familiarity with communities, residents and organizing practices and tools, and are often overlooked by other nonprofits (and funders) as a resource both for their own community engagement efforts and for organizational collaboratives. Even grassroots organizations often do not see themselves this way, but there is an opportunity to engage in a concerted effort to bolster and activate this underutilized asset to strengthen the larger nonprofit sector's ability to tap into and more authentically engage the communities they serve.

Policy & Advocacy

Unlike WNY, policy and advocacy was discussed as a significant gap or need in CNY focus groups; however, it was ranked lower in the survey as a priority for support in CNY than WNY. Nonetheless, leaders felt that the central New York area is weak on advocacy compared to downstate and the Hudson Valley. In addition, they felt that more advocacy by foundations and nonprofits to help ease the heavy compliance load required by the state is needed.

Research, Evaluation & Strategic Learning

To understand and forecast evolving community needs, inform program development and refinement, measure outcomes, account for resources and promote organizational learning

Research, Evaluation & Strategic Learning
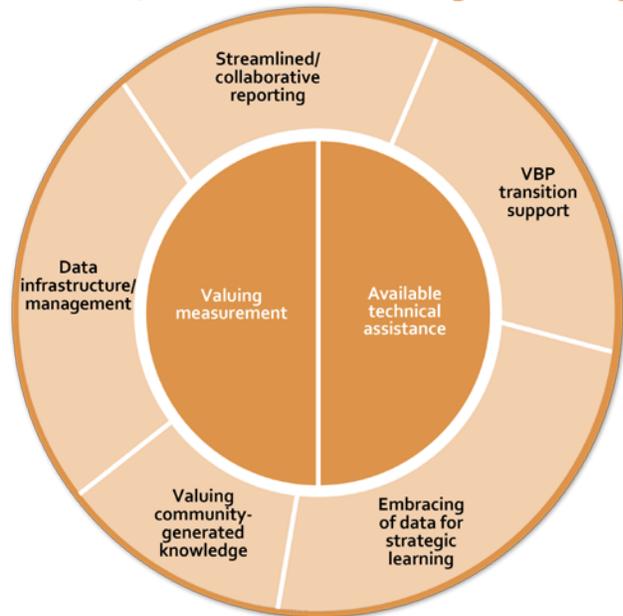
Assets

When discussing Research, Evaluation and Learning (R/E/SL), organizations **appreciate the value** in collecting data related to outcomes to help make their case and inform funder priorities.

Study participants acknowledge that there are quality **technical assistance resources** available to help organizations with their research, evaluation and strategic learning needs including local universities and a local foundation.

Gaps/Needs

Appreciation for local expertise

Nonprofit leaders felt that community experience and knowledge was often devalued while "best practices" and "evidence-based" models from other communities were held up as the gold standard. Leaders shared their frustration with being required to take on models from elsewhere that had been published (which often then need to be adapted for the local context) rather than being supported in adapting and innovating locally. Funders can support local innovation and assist with establishing a local evidence base of successful practices and programs that build on local programs' innovation and adaptability.

Data infrastructure/management

Many organizations struggle with and need support in the areas of data management and infrastructure before they are ready to engage in higher level outcome tracking or evaluation and see this area as ripe for investment. Data infrastructure and management was highlighted as a particular challenge for smaller organizations where staff wear many hats and are less able to specialize.

R/E/SL, while creating value in terms of generating important data for strategic learning, requires an investment in human capital and data management systems which organizations often struggle to afford. An unfunded requirement to produce evidence of impact pushes the cost of this infrastructure onto the organization and can lead to weaker organizational systems and negatively impact program quality. Additional support for R/E/SL activities would be helpful to organizations in creating stronger programs, demonstrating their value, and telling their story.

Embracing data for strategic learning

In addition to support for data infrastructure, many feel that the sector needs more assistance making a cultural shift within organizations to embrace and use data for strategic learning and continuous quality improvement. Some feel that beyond using data for compliance, nonprofit staff do not necessarily know what data to collect for themselves and how to use that data strategically to make decisions, change their operations, and inform planning and program management activities.

Streamlined reporting

Nonprofits are under pressure to meet myriad data and reporting requirements for multiple funders, for multiple programs. The shift to a value based payment (VBP) model were mentioned as particularly difficult and not necessarily a "value add" to their work. The sheer number of ways organizations are expected to report results uses up much of their current organizational capacity in terms of data analysis, tracking, and evaluation.

The pressure to fulfill funding requirements without a comparative investment in organizational capacity can take away from the actual work on the ground and can sometimes keep organizations from identifying and tracking the most relevant data for their own strategic learning and continuous quality improvement, including using data to make decisions, change their operations, and inform planning and program management activities.

Streamlined reporting among local private funders would help free up some time to dedicate to deeper engagement in research, evaluation, and strategic learning. Funders could also simplify requirements by having organizations report on elements that they are already measuring or shifting their processes to allow organizations to set their own "theory of change" approach and then asking for reporting on the key metrics that evolve from that approach.

Continued assistance with value based payments

In addition to streamlined reporting among local foundations, nonprofit leaders noted organizations can still use outside technical assistance with preparing to meet VBP requirements. Some organizations fear being left behind and even organizations that

have received technical assistance to support the transition noted that they were still working on their ability to evaluate and measure their impact.

Many organizations expressed frustration with the demands of VBP which focus staff time on administration instead of direct care. While some see the value in using quantitative data and accountability strategically, organizations serving populations with complex, multi-faceted needs that invest significant time in activities like community outreach, family engagement in patient care, trust and relationship-building, and other work that is more difficult to quantify, feel that work is ignored and undervalued by value-based payment models.

Several organizations speculated on the future of VBP, whether it will force smaller agencies out of business or to merge with larger institutions or whether state and federal agencies will continue with VBP at all. Regardless, those in the VBP space are operating with high degrees of uncertainty and see a need for continued support in sorting out how best to proceed.

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Commitment to, and extent to which, these principles are embedded in board governance, leadership, policies and practices, research and learning and program development

Assets

While more needs to be done to address structural racism in society and within nonprofit organizations themselves, some CNY nonprofits are **modeling DEI policies and practices** to help hire and retain diverse staff, address cultural competency and ensure that internal policies and benefits don't unjustly affect a specific group.

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI)

In addition, leaders held up **models of community engagement practices** among grassroots organizations as a critical asset to the community and other organizations as they strive to be equitable, diverse, and inclusive in their work.
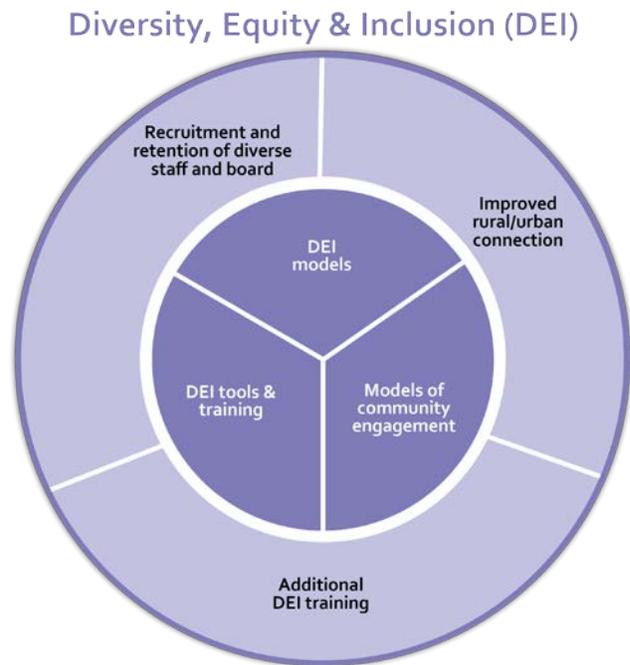
Finally, nonprofit leaders cited **available DEI resources and trainings**, both locally and remotely, as assets for helping organizations address the way they approach DEI. In fact, organizational survey respondents listed delivering culturally responsive services and developing policies/practices for cultural competence, diversity, equity, and inclusion as two of the most common professional services they as organizations provide to others.

Gaps/Needs

It is interesting to note that, CNY survey respondents listed higher rates of challenge than WNY in every DEI category.

CNY Rank	Domain	Question	CNY % moderate or serious challenge	WNY
3	DEI	Recruiting/retaining diverse staff and board members	76%	64%
13	DEI	Engaging the populations we serve work with to bring their voice into program/service design	47%	37%
17	DEI	Developing/implementing internal policies/practices that support cultural competence/diversity/equity/inclusion	44%	33%
27	DEI	Delivering services in a culturally responsive way	35%	28%

While limited survey respondent rates in both CNY and WNY make it difficult to draw concrete conclusions, this pattern could be influenced by recent programmatic focuses by foundations and service organizations such as the Human Service Leadership Council in CNY which has created a heightened awareness around these issues in CNY. Nonetheless, organizational leaders in CNY discussed several gaps and needs in this area that echoed those in WNY.

Additional DEI trainings and resources

While DEI trainings are available, leaders know that organizations' familiarity and competency with DEI principles and practices vary and they are often working in a fairly challenging political climate. They acknowledge that more needs to be done to help organizations deepen their commitment and knowledge base in this domain.

They also see this as an area for possible collaboration among funders and providers in leveraging trainings and resources regionally to help address resources gaps across counties.

Recruiting and retaining diverse staff and board

Nonprofit leaders also identified a need to get better at recruiting and retaining diverse staff and leadership (including their boards). Leaders cited challenges ranging from

knowing where to start, to finding diverse credentialed staff, to training first-time board members from the communities they serve, to attracting diverse board members to their missions.

Improved urban/rural connection

Nonprofit leaders in rural communities say they often have difficulty in attracting funding due to issues of scale. Often frustrated with funders' focus on impact in terms of the number of people served, they argue that working in rural areas needs to be reframed as an equity issue. While working in rural areas is more expensive in terms of people served, they nonetheless deserve the appropriate resources and supports they need to thrive, and that those supports need to be tailored to the unique conditions of rural living.

Connections to other Alignment & Collaboration domain

It is important to note that there are connections to challenges within other domains (primarily Alignment & Collaboration) that affect DEI and vice-versa including engaging and co-producing with communities and the need for more expansive networks and partnerships.

Vision & Mission

> Ability to inform and affect other components including programming and services offered, leadership, fundraising, networking, strategic planning and aligned measurement

Vision and Mission

Assets

Overall, like WNY, CNY nonprofits feel fairly **confident in their ability to articulate their vision and mission**. It was the second most commonly identified organizational strength on the organizational survey (35% of respondents). However, smaller and younger organizations were more likely to lift up challenges with vision and mission articulation than organizations overall.
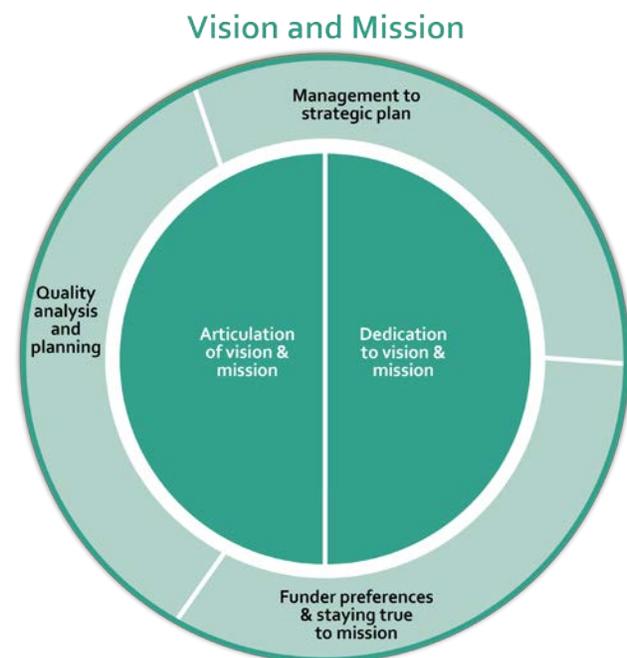
Nonprofit leaders also named their overall **commitment and dedication** to the mission and vision of their organizations as an asset to creating community change.

Gaps/Needs

Funder preferences & staying true to mission

Nonprofit leaders expressed concern about funders, particularly corporate funders, preferring to support more "appealing" missions and the difficulty of resisting specific funding opportunities that are off-mission in order to access financial resources.

Actively managing to the strategic plan

Ensuring that strategic plans remain "living documents" rather than sitting on a shelf is also a challenge. Leaders easily become consumed by the day-to-day operations and management of organizations due to stretched resources and limited staffing. This makes it difficult for leaders take the time to reflect on and manage to the stated plan while being able to adjust it in the face of changing conditions and community need.

Quality analysis & planning

Nonprofit leaders discussed the risk of poor strategic planning services and strategic planning with no real analysis of what it will take to get the work done. Strategic planning can often take place in a vacuum and strategic planning with a deep dive into an organization's capacity is more likely to result in a more realistic and achievable plan.

Leadership

Skills and abilities including board governance and succession planning, as well as relational skills, attention to self-care/mindfulness and willingness to work collectively with diverse groups for systems change

Assets

Nonprofit leaders identified the **deep expertise** among the leaders in the sector as an asset that can be leveraged to share lessons learned and grow new leaders. They also noted the **long-term commitment** these professionals have made to the CNY nonprofit sector, allowing for relationships to bloom and trust to be built making collaboration easier.

CNY is home to a number of existing **leadership networks and programs**, that are important in making connections, sharing lessons, and learning about and creating new opportunities and that can be used as models for other parts of the region.

Finally, leaders in CNY, more than those is WNY, discussed a few **burnout prevention model programs** designed to promote work/life balance that could offer lessons for others dealing with these issues. In WNY, board of directors were discussed as leadership assets more than CNY.

Gaps/Needs

Succession planning

Organizations understand the need for succession planning, but cite challenges in finding and growing the leadership pipeline with few middle-management positions in which people can grow into executive skills and with many qualified graduates leaving the area. Rural areas in particular identified challenges in filling and maintaining a talent pipeline.

Leadership development

There are a number of robust leadership development programs and opportunities available to organizations in CNY that are models for the area as whole. Organizations

take advantage of local leadership development programs when they can, but are challenged by limited time and resources (especially highly restrictive government grants and the demands of VBP transition efforts) to create and implement more strategic and systemic leadership development efforts within their organizations.

Work/life balance

Participants lifted up the danger of burnout among both executive and front line staff. Some organizations offer non-monetary supports or implement policies to help enforce self-care, but executives acknowledged the difficulty in managing self-care and work/life balance for both themselves and their staff.

Board recruitment

Recruiting board members from diverse backgrounds and with needed skill sets is a significant challenge for many organizations. Organizations cite challenges in setting board meeting times and locations that are sensitive to busy community members, finding board members that are willing to fundraise, and missions that tend to appeal to certain demographics. They also cited the self-perpetuating board model in which board members may have a tendency to identify and choose replacements that look and think like them. Small and rural organizations were more likely to mention challenges with board recruitment, with rural organizations citing long distances and harsh winter weather. (See also 'recruitment and retention of diverse staff and board' in the DEI domain.)

Board management & training

While a few nonprofits highlighted their successes with alternate models of board governance and how they have worked to engage the board in more strategic ways such as teleconference capability and consent agendas, many leaders held up board training and management as an ongoing pressing regional need, especially since board members are constantly changing, to help their organizations build their capacity.

Special considerations

Rural communities

Leaders in rural communities discussed the following themes slightly differently than those in urban areas:

- **Information Technology**: IT needs struck a particular chord for organizations in rural areas, where they struggle with the digital divide and physical access to professional IT services. This limits their access to certain resources (including

webinars, and online trainings and resources) that urban counterparts take for granted.

- **Succession planning and leadership pipeline**: Rural organizations struggle to compete with urban areas in finding and retaining senior level leaders.

- **Board recruitment:** Similarly, rural organizations highlighted board recruitment as a particular area of need given their smaller pool of willing candidates and logistics such as rural roads in winter.

- **DEI**: Rural organizations vary in their use of DEI language and an equity lens, although many are considering socioeconomic status in their work. Reported barriers to adopting DEI practices across a diversity of dimensions (race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, disabilities, etc.) included the relative lack of diversity in rural areas, combined with generational poverty, and the current political climate.

- **Scale:** Nonprofit leaders in rural areas identified a challenge in communicating the differences in scale to urban funders and attracting their interest in working in their communities. In particular, they highlighted that the lower population density, decentralization of services, and lack of transportation often result in higher program costs per person to achieve the levels of impact seen in urban areas. Additionally, leaders noted challenges with their ability to implement programs that have been developed for urban settings.

- **Issue reframe**: Nonprofit leaders in rural areas felt that there needs to be a shift away from the focus on numbers served in rural areas and to reframe it as an diversity, equity and inclusion issue in which rural populations deserve the appropriate resources and supports they need to thrive, and that those supports need to be tailored to the unique conditions of rural living.

Small organizations

Smaller organizations had many of the same organizational challenges as the rest of the nonprofit community, but were more likely to lift up challenges with:

- Being stretched thin with very small or no staff; as a result staff have to wear many hats and somehow do it all

- Vision and mission articulation

- Strategic planning and ensuring that the plan remained a living document

- Succession planning, especially if the executive is the organization's founder

- Data infrastructure and information technology

- Volunteer management

- Not being valued for their knowledge, skill and expertise as much as larger agencies

New/young organizations

Newer and younger organizations named similar challenges as small organizations including:

- Vision and mission articulation

- Strategic planning

- Not being valued for their knowledge, skill and expertise as much as more established agencies

Organizations serving special populations

Organizations serving primarily special populations (racial/ethnic minorities, LBGTQ, those with disabilities) were more likely to lift up their DEI policies as a strength.

Appendix A: Capacity Building Framework

To guide this study, CGR and the CHWNB adopted the following definitions:

- *Capacity* is a wide range of capabilities, knowledge and resources that nonprofits need in order to be effective.[13]

- *Capacity building,* as defined by Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO), is "the funding and technical assistance to help nonprofits increase specific capacities to deliver stronger programs, take risks, build connections, innovate and iterate.[14]" Capacity building needs to be tailored to the ability or "readiness" of the nonprofit to engage.

- Adopting another GEO definition, *technical assistance,* is "the process by which organizations obtain the necessary knowledge, tools and other resources to develop, implement and assess targeted improvements in their work; this process is often supported by a consultant or expert". This term is often used interchangeably with capacity building.[15]

In addition, CGR and CHWNB jointly created a capacity building framework. In developing this framework, we read and adapted materials from other sources such as those from the Urban Institute,[16] Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO), and the TCC group[17]. We reinforced existing models with a greater emphasis on diversity, equity and inclusion, turning to information from the Leadership Learning Community for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.[18] Further, we brought to this process our value for asset-based community development[19] and the importance of engaging with community.

---

[13]A Funder's Guide to Organizational Assessment, GEO and Fieldstone Alliance, 2005

[14] *Strengthening Nonprofit Capacity*, Grantmakers for Effective Philanthropy (2016) https://philanthropynewyork.org/sites/default/files/resources/geo_2016_strengtheningnonprofitcapacity.pdf

[15] *Strengthening Nonprofit Capacity,* Grantmakers for Effective Philanthropy (2016)

[16] DeVita, Carol and Cory Flemming, *Building Capacity in Nonprofit Organizations.* Urban Institute (2001) http://research.urban.org/UploadedPDF/building_capacity.PDF

[17] *Capacity Building 3.0*, TCC Group. https://www.tccgrp.com/resource/capacity-building-3-0-how-to-strengthen-the-social-ecosystem/

[18] Leadership Learning Community, *Developing a Racial Justice and Leadership Framework to Promote Racial Equity* (2009) http://leadershiplearning.org/system/files/Racial%20Equity%20and%20Leadership%20Scan.pdf

[19] Information on asset-based community development can be found at https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/Pages/default.aspx

CGR Promising Solutions

Community
Ways that the organization, staff, and leaders interact and co-produce solutions with the broader community and people served

Organization
Ways in which individuals relate and work together to create and implement organizational policies and practices and create organizational culture

Individual
Staff and leadership skills and abilities including professional development, executive development, peer learning, recruitment, and attention to self-care while caring for others

Resources
Including finances, human capacity, networks of support, information technology, communications resources, and physical space

Leadership
Skills and abilities including board governance and succession planning, as well as relational skills, attention to self-care/mindfulness and willingness to work collectively with diverse groups for systems change

Alignment & Collaboration
Engaging and mobilizing communities and clients, partnering with other organizations, working across sectors, and engaging in advocacy efforts requires alignment of work across communities and working with groups and networks

Vision & Mission
Ability to inform and affect other components including programming and services offered, leadership, fundraising, networking, strategic planning and aligned measurement

Research, Evaluation, & Strategic Learning
To understand and forecast evolving community needs, inform program development and refinement, measure outcomes, account for resources and promote organizational learning.

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion
Commitment to and extent to which these principles are embedded in board governance, leadership, policies and practices, research and learning and program development

We view capacity as something that cuts across different levels—**individual, organization, and community.** The organization and its capacity are vital, as are the people within the organization and the organization's capabilities, knowledge, and resources within the larger community:

- *Individual Capacity* refers to staff and leadership skills and abilities. This includes professional development, executive development, peer learning, recruitment and retention, and succession planning. It also considers the way people "show up" for work and take care of themselves as they take care of other people—especially important when considering the direct service work of many nonprofit organizations.

- *Organizational Capacity* reflects the ways that individuals relate and work together to create and implement organizational policies and practices and, through those actions, create organizational culture.

- *Community Capacity* reflects the ways that the organization, staff, and leaders interact with the broader community and people served (e.g.: clients, patients, consumers). Community capacity may include representation of people served on

cgr
Promising Solutions

boards of directors, cultural competence/responsiveness, and ways of interacting within and across the community.

The framework is comprised of six domains (resources; alignment and collaboration; vision and mission; research; evaluation and strategic learning; and diversity, equity, and inclusion) that are commonly found in all organizations. As a system, each factor reinforces and bolsters the others in the model and can be viewed as possible intervention points for enhancing organizational capacity. Each of the components of the framework works at all three levels of the framework: individual, organization, and community.

Resources

Resources affect the organization's ability to carry out its mission, attract competent leadership, engage in collaborations, and assess its effectiveness. Although resources do not necessarily need to be extensive, they do need to be well-managed. Resources include: finances, human capacity, networks of support, information technology, communications resources, and physical space.

Alignment and collaboration

Individual organizations operate within larger and complex ecosystems that affect their operations and effectiveness. It is no longer feasible to think that one organization or even one field or sector can address the increasingly complex and changing environments that nonprofit organizations face.

More and more, organizations and their staff are being called to engage and mobilize their communities and clients differently, share power, partner with other (and more diverse) organizations, and work across sectors and engage in advocacy efforts. This means that they have to align their work (including their own policies, practices, and programming) to what others in the community are doing, communicate, and "connect the dots." Organizing and mobilizing people to action calls for the ability to work with ad hoc groups and networks to lead change work.

This kind of work often requires a shift in mindset and a different set of skills and activities that can be new or a challenge for organizations that have traditionally been internally focused on their own work and clients/stakeholders.

Vision and Mission

An organization's vision and mission informs and affects other segments of the capacity building framework including: the types of programs and services offered; its ability to attract and retain leaders who share its goals, and who will be influential in setting, maintaining and redirecting the vision and mission; its strategy for raising

funds; the type of networking and partnerships it enters into; and its approach to assessing the effectiveness of its work. An organization needs to reflect on the connections between its mission and vision, its programmatic priorities, and the extent to which it upholds diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Research, evaluation and strategic learning (R/E/SL)

Timely and meaningful research data can provide a better understanding and forecasting of evolving community needs, inform program development and refinement, measure the outcomes of programs and their value, account for use of resources, promote organizational learning, create new understanding about what works and what does not, strengthen the case for program funding, and help to articulate context, rationale and benefits of programs to communicate with stakeholders, boards, funders, and other audiences.[20] Nonprofits must also value the stories of the people with whom they work, and advocate that others (funders, government) understand these stories as well. Through sharing stories, communities build their identities, pass on traditions, and construct their reality.

Diversity, equity and inclusion[21]

The effectiveness of all elements is influenced by an organization's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. Organizations that embed these principles (e.g. in board governance, leadership, policies and practices, research and learning, program development) are better positioned to understand the needs of a diverse client base, engage in meaningful dialogue and create more effective solutions. They are better able to address more upstream, root cause solutions and system change efforts. Attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion means supporting the leadership of persons of color and fostering an integrated cross-sector leadership approach focused

---

[20]Sim, Shao-Chee, PhD. *What is Research and How Can Research Benefit Your Organization*, Charles B. Wang Community Health Center https://med.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/asian-health2/How_Research_Benefits_Nonprofits_Shao_Chee_Sim.pdf

[21] Independent Sector defines diversity, equity and inclusion as follows: *Diversity* includes all the ways in which people differ, encompassing the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. *Equity* is individuals and organizations giving fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups. Improving equity involves increasing justice and fairness within the procedures and processes of institutions or systems, as well as in their distribution of resources. Tackling equity issues requires an understanding of the root causes of outcome disparities within our society. *Inclusion* is the act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences and offers respect in words and actions for all people. https://independentsector.org/resource/why-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-matter/

on systems-wide change rather than individual leadership that tackles problems as isolated special interests.

Leadership (board, staff and volunteers)

Strong and effective leadership is vital, and the skills and abilities of leaders required for effectiveness have evolved over time, with added emphasis on relational skills, attention to self-care/mindfulness, and willingness/ability to work collectively with diverse groups for systems change.

Structurally, an organization requires leadership at every level and encourages problem solving and decision-making throughout the organization. Contemporary views of leadership include attention to a culture of connectedness, inclusiveness, collaboration and innovation (defined as shifting underlying assumptions, moving away from previous practices, and finding new pathways for achieving goals). This view of leadership is in contrast with the more traditional hierarchical structures and practice of many nonprofit organizations[22] and requires a new way of working. Leaders must be able to work effectively in a "VUCA" world—one full of Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity. This is accomplished by asking different types of questions, taking on multiple perspectives, developing a systemic vision, and looking at the whole picture.[23]

Organizations and developing leaders require support (sometimes through mentorship and internships) to work across differences, strengthen collective leadership action, leverage leadership networks, support unrecognized community leadership, and systemically address social and economic disparities. Leadership development must include approaches that build on community power and address institutionalized causes of disparities.[24]

---

[22] *Moving Arts Leadership Forward*. The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, 2016
[23] *Leadership Challenges in a VUCA World*. Oxford Leadership (2016)
https://www.oxfordleadership.com/leadership-challenges-v-u-c-world/
[24] Leadership Learning Community, *Developing a Racial Justice and Leadership Framework to Promote Racial Equity* (2009)
http://leadershiplearning.org/system/files/Racial%20Equity%20and%20Leadership%20Scan.pdf

Appendix B: Organizational Survey

Methodology

To identify the nonprofit organizations in the eight county region[25] encompassed by this study, we accessed data from the IRS' Exempt Organizations Business Master File.[26] This yielded a list of 7,362 organizations.

We then applied a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria we jointly created with the HFWCNY to narrow the list.

We began by excluding organizations with zero assets and budgets of less than $25,000 as a proxy for inactive or minimally active organizations. We then used the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE) codes[27] to exclude the following types or organizations.

Colleges/Universities/Scholarships	Labor Unions/Trade organizations
Agriculture Societies & Fairs	Medical Research Organizations
Animal-Related Organizations	Membership Organizations, Auxiliaries
Churches and other places of worship not listed elsewhere	Philanthropy, Grantmaking Foundations
Environmental Garden Clubs	Private & Parochial schools
Hospitals	Science & Technology Research Institutions
International Support/Relief	Sports Booster Clubs, Friends Groups, & Associations
	Youth Sports

After applying these criteria, we were left with 836 organizations. The IRS database does not include contact information however, so we worked to identify email

---

[25] Cayuga, Cortland, Herkimer, Madison, Oneida, Onondaga, Oswego, Tompkins

[26] The Exempt Organization Business Master File Extract (EO BMF) includes cumulative information on exempt organizations. The data are extracted monthly and are available by state and region.

[27] The National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE) system is used by the IRS and the National Center for Charitable Statistics to classify nonprofit organizations.

addresses for as many organizations as possible. Using data from the study Advisory Committee members and searching organizational websites, we found email addresses for 587 executives or board chairs in the eight-county area.

We deliberately targeted executives and board members to help ensure that we received one survey response per organization and not privilege organizations that had the capacity to send responses from multiple staff members.

Of these 587 organizations surveyed, we received responses from 86 for a response rate of 15%. Given this response rate, the survey provided a broad brush picture of what the responding nonprofits consider their overarching strengths and challenges and needs across the six capacity building domains in our framework. We cannot claim that these responses represent the Central New York nonprofit sector as a whole. To provide more nuance and insight into assets and needs in each of the domains, we conducted a series of interviews and focus groups with nonprofit leaders to add additional voices.

Survey respondents' profile

Location of responses

Of the 86 organizations that responded, 47% have offices in Onondaga County.
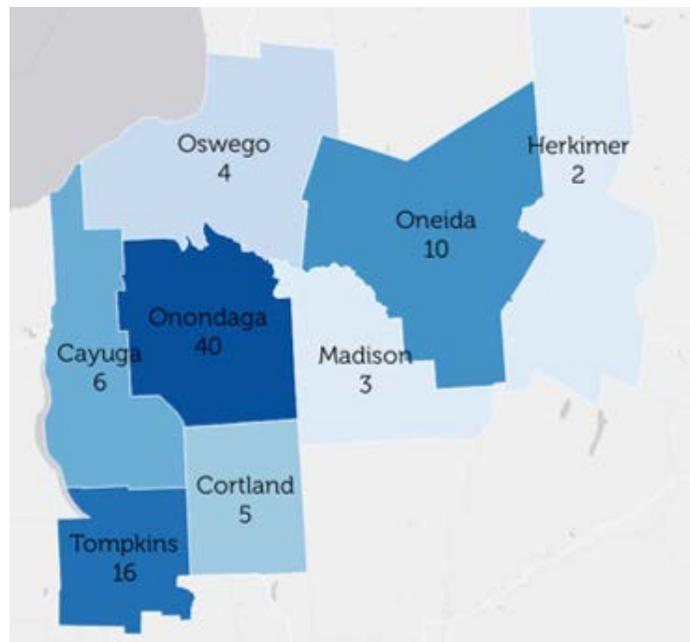
Most organizations (67%) have their offices in urban locations. One quarter of the respondents have offices in a rural location. Roughly 21% of organizations have offices in suburban locations. About 12% report having offices in more than one type of location, and 2 organizations reports having an office in an urban, rural, and suburban location.

Organization Location Urban/Suburban/Rural
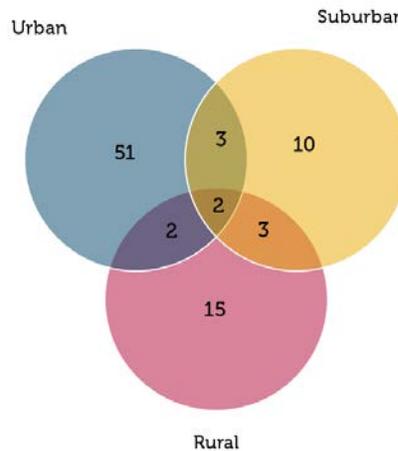
Populations served

Urban/Suburban/Rural

The majority of organizations say they serve people in all three geographies. (Note that respondents could chose multiple types of populations.)
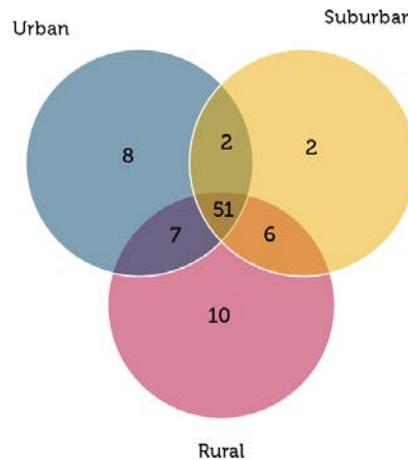
Minority serving organizations

About 14% of respondents say they primarily work with/serve racial/ethnic minority populations and most of these (92%) are urban-serving organizations.

Serves Minorities
14%

Does Not Serve
Minorities
86%

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%   60%   70%   80%   90%   100%
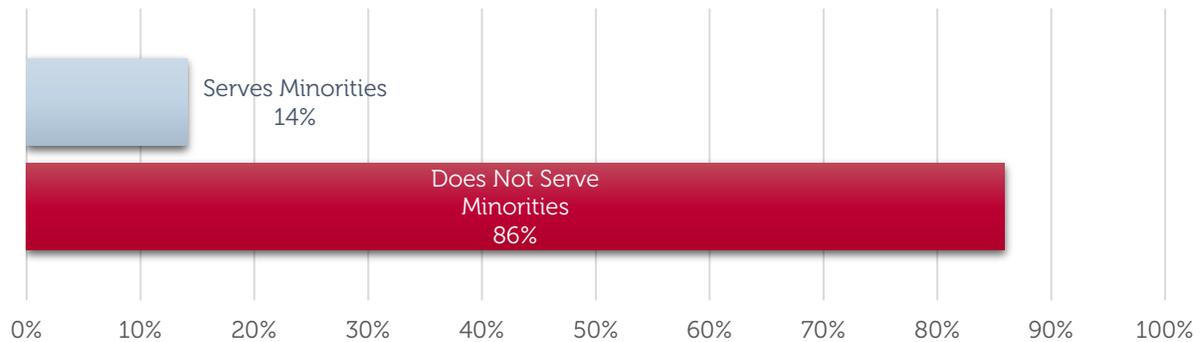
Focus areas

The majority of respondents say they focus on health, and children and youth. Most organizations (52) listed three focus areas (respondents could choose all that apply).

Environment 2
Other 4
Special Populations 9
Employment 9
Arts & Culture 20
Human Services 26
Communities 26
Children and Youth 31
Health 35

0   5   10   15   20   25   30   35   40
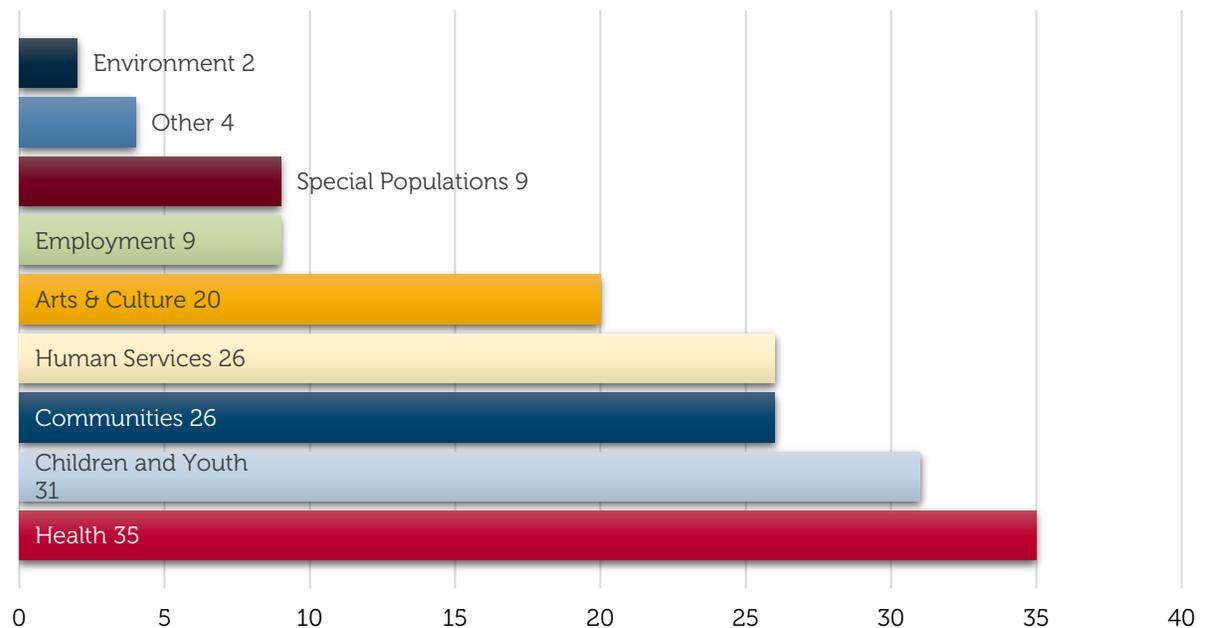
Notes:

Communities: Housing, community & economic development, community coalitions

Arts & culture: Includes libraries

Special populations: Immigrants, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ

Budget size

Most respondents had budgets under $500,000 or over $1 million.

Under $500K 42%	$500K to $999K 17%	$1M to $19M 35%	20M+ 7%

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%   60%   70%   80%   90%   100%

Number of employees

Over two-thirds of responding organizations have 20 or fewer employees.

0 to 5 27%	6 to 20 35%	21 to 99 27%	100+ 11%

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%   60%   70%   80%   90%   100%
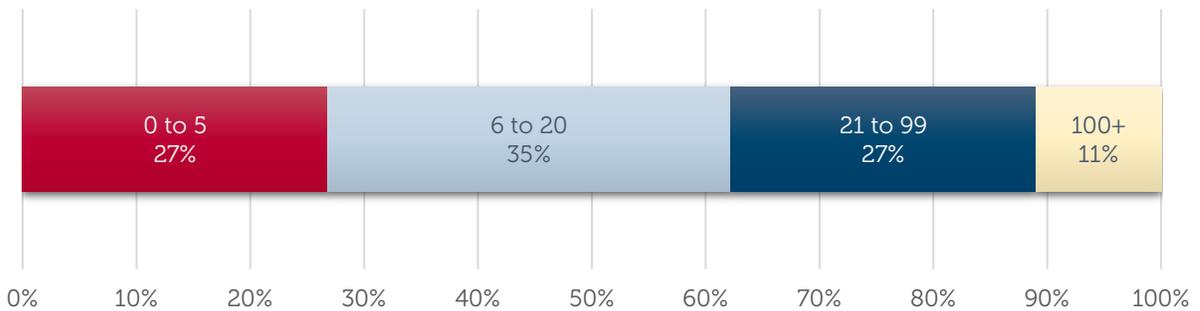
Organizational age

Most of the organizations that responded are well established. 80% of organizations have existed for over 20 years.

0 to 10 11%	11 to 20 9%	20 to 49 55%	50+ 25%

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%   60%   70%   80%   90%   100%
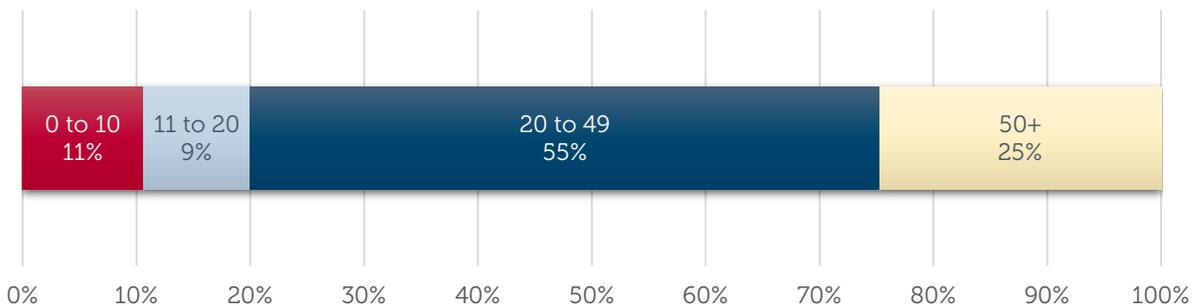
Survey Findings

The survey asked organizations to identify their organizational capacity building challenges, priorities for external support, and strengths.

Organizational Challenges

Organizations were asked the extent to which elements in each domain were a challenge in their organization. If an organization listed at least one element as a moderate or serious challenge in a domain, they were categorized as having a challenge in that domain.

The Resources domain[28] was highlighted as the area with the most challenges and in need of the most support – with fundraising and development functions, forecasting changes to the funding landscape, and human resources were mentioned most often as key challenges and priorities for external support.

Share of organizations with challenges by domain
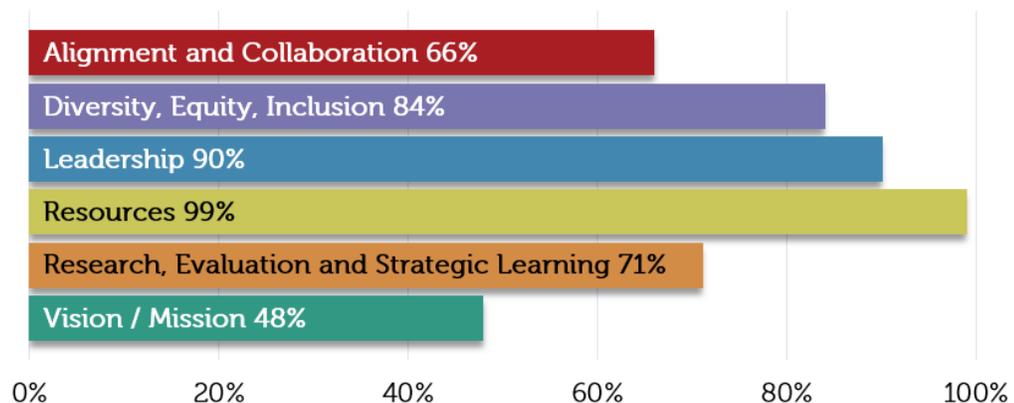
Challenges related to Leadership were the next most commonly selected (in particular board governance, work/life balance, and finding leaders and developing leadership skills), followed by DEI (particularly recruiting and retaining diverse staff and board) and Research, Evaluation, and Strategic Learning. See table below for organizational responses by question. Western New York data is provided for comparison.

Survey respondents cited fewer challenges with Vision & Mission and Alignment & Collaboration (A&C). They were more likely to hold up elements of those domains as organizational strengths (see strengths table later in this document).

---

[28]Resources includes finances, human capacity, networks of support, information technology, communications resources, and physical space. See the Capacity Building Framework used to inform this study for more information as to the elements included in each domain.

Challenge Rank	Domain	Question	% moderate or serious challenge	WNY
1	Resources	Fundraising and development to support org priorities	88%	92%
2	Resources	Forecasting changes to the funding landscape/capitalizing on new revenue sources	83%	89%
3	DEI	Recruiting/retaining diverse staff and board members	76%	64%
4	Leadership	Board Governance	65%	66%
5	Leadership	Finding ways to maintain work life balance/prevent burnout	65%	63%
6	Resources	Human Resources	64%	67%
7	Leadership	Finding capable leaders/developing leadership skills	62%	60%
8	Resources	Communications and marketing	62%	55%
9	Resources	Obtaining/maintaining IT	61%	49%
10	Leadership	Leading in an environment of volatility/uncertainty/complexity/ambiguity	56%	54%
11	Leadership	Executive Director/CEO succession planning	53%	55%
12	RESL	Measuring/evaluating/understanding value of programs/services	51%	59%
13	DEI	Engaging the populations we serve work with to bring their voice into program/service design	47%	37%
14	RESL	Analyzing/reflecting on our data to inform practice/decision making	47%	55%
15	RESL	Measuring/reporting program outcomes,	46%	47%
16	Resources	Volunteer recruitment/management	45%	52%
17	DEI	Developing/implementing internal policies/practices that support cultural competence/diversity/equity/inclusion	44%	33%
18	Resources	Facilities	43%	52%
19	A&C	Collaborating with organizations outside of our sector/discipline	41%	49%
20	Vision & Mission	Developing and executing a strategic plan that ties activities to vision & mission	41%	34%
21	RESL	Collecting/processing/using information about population needs	41%	47%
22	A&C	Community organizing to bring citizens together	39%	45%
23	A&C	Engaging effectively in policy and advocacy to address issues important to our target population	39%	46%
24	A&C	Convening people and organizations to address a community issue	38%	34%
25	RESL	Designing/delivering effective programs based on research/best practice	37%	43%
26	Resources	Financial management including budgeting and accounting	36%	36%

27	DEI	Delivering services in a culturally responsive way	35%	28%
28	A&C	Collaborating with similar organizations to address a community issue	22%	32%
29	Vision & Mission	Articulating a clear and meaningful vision and mission to guide our work	21%	20%
30	Vision & Mission	Aligning organizational priorities to our mission and vision	17%	21%
31	Resources	Networks/Peer or Professional Networks	15%	30%

Certain organizational challenges also tended to be positively correlated (move together). The lines in the graphic on the next page indicate where correlations exist; line thickness represent degrees of correlations, so the thicker the line the greater the correlation. For example, in the Alignment & Collaboration domain, organizations that listed challenges in community organizing were more likely to also list challenges in convening (and vice versa). Similarly, in the R/E/SL domain, organizations that listed challenges in terms of data informed practices were more likely to list challenges in terms of measuring and reporting program outcomes.

Correlated Challenges

Convening

Alignment & Collaboration

Vision & Mission

Community Organizing

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Collaborating Similar Orgs

Collaborating Outside Sector

Resources

Research, Evaluation & Strategic Learning

Program Outcomes

Leadership

Data Informed Practices

Organizational Priority Areas for Support

Organizations were asked to select their top three priority areas for external support. In general, the areas of support aligned with the challenges listed. The top area across the board where respondents wanted support was fundraising and development. In general, respondents did not prioritize support in alignment and collaboration (A&C), though within that domain collaborating with other organizations was the most common priority.

Rank	Domain	Areas of Support	% listed as top 3	# Orgs	WNY
1	Resources	Fundraising and development	55%	42	51%
2	DEI	Recruiting/retaining diverse staff and board	28%	21	20%
3	Resources	Communications and marketing	21%	16	20%
4	Leadership	Board governance	20%	15	15%
5	DEI	Engaging the population we serve/work with to bring their voice into program/service design	17%	13	8%
6	Resources	Information technology (IT)	16%	12	18%
7	Vision or Mission	Strategic planning to advance our mission and vision	14%	11	13%
8	RESL	Measuring and reporting program outcomes	13%	10	26%
9	Resources	Volunteer recruitment/management	13%	10	12%
10	Leadership	Succession planning	12%	9	13%
11	Resources	Facilities	12%	9	11%
12	Resources	Human resources	12%	9	8%
13	DEI	Developing policies/practices for cultural competence, diversity, equity, inclusion	11%	8	4%
14	Leadership	Self-care and burnout prevention	11%	8	12%
15	RESL	Using data/research to inform practice and decision-making	8%	6	19%
16	A&C	Collaborating with other organizations	7%	5	4%
17	Leadership	Leadership development	7%	5	12%
18	Resources	Financial management	5%	4	4%
19	A&C	Policy and advocacy	4%	3	8%
20	A&C	Being a convener	3%	2	2%
21	DEI	Delivering culturally responsive services	3%	2	3%
22	Resources	Accessing peer or professional networks	1%	1	1%

cgr Promising Solutions

Organizational Areas of Strength

Overall, nonprofits listed collaborating with others as their primary strength. Other alignment and collaboration (A&C) and vision and mission elements were also viewed as strong. 22% of nonprofits also felt strong in their ability to engage the populations they served and bring their voice into program design.

Rank	Domain	Areas of Strength	Percent	# Orgs	WNY
1	A&C	Collaborating with other organizations	40%	22	46%
2	Vision or Mission	Articulating a clear mission and vision	35%	19	29%
3	A&C	Sharing and learning from peers	24%	13	28%
4	DEI	Engaging the population we serve/work with to bring their voice into program/service design	22%	12	23%
5	Resources	Financial management	22%	12	24%
6	Vision or Mission	Strategic planning to advance our mission and vision	20%	11	22%
7	DEI	Delivering culturally responsive services	18%	10	17%
8	Leadership	Leadership development	18%	10	18%
9	A&C	Policy and advocacy	16%	9	17%
10	Leadership	Board governance	16%	9	15%
11	Resources	Accessing peer or professional networks	16%	9	9%
12	A&C	Being a convener	15%	8	21%
13	Resources	Volunteer recruitment/management	15%	8	16%
14	RESL	Using data/research to inform practice and decision-making	13%	7	15%
15	A&C	Community organizing	11%	6	15%
16	RESL	Measuring and reporting program outcomes	11%	6	19%
17	Resources	Communications and marketing	11%	6	16%
18	DEI	Recruiting/retaining diverse staff and board	9%	5	9%
19	Resources	Fundraising and development	9%	5	18%
20	DEI	Developing policies/practices for cultural competence, diversity, equity, inclusion	7%	4	15%
21	Leadership	Succession planning	7%	4	9%
22	Leadership	Self-care and burnout prevention	5%	3	9%
23	Resources	Human resources	5%	3	7%
24	Resources	Information technology (IT)	4%	2	7%
25	Resources	Facilities	2%	1	18%

Professional Services

A little over a quarter of the organizations stated they provide professional services. These services are primarily in the alignment and collaboration (A&C) and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and domains.

Rank	Domain	Professional Services (21 orgs)	Percent	# Orgs	WNY
1	A&C	Sharing and learning from peers	43%	9	23%
2	A&C	Collaborating with other organizations	29%	6	19%
3	A&C	Community organizing	29%	6	21%
4	DEI	Delivering culturally responsive services	29%	6	27%
5	Leadership	Self-care and burnout prevention	29%	6	8%
6	DEI	Engaging the population we serve/work with to bring their voice into program/service design	24%	5	21%
7	DEI	Developing policies/practices for cultural competence, diversity, equity, inclusion	19%	4	23%
8	DEI	Recruiting/retaining diverse staff and board	19%	4	8%
9	Resources	Accessing peer or professional networks	19%	4	10%
10	Leadership	Leadership development	14%	3	15%
11	RESL	Measuring and reporting program outcomes	14%	3	19%
12	RESL	Using data/research to inform practice and decision-making	14%	3	13%
13	Resources	Communications and marketing	14%	3	12%
14	Resources	Human resources	14%	3	6%
15	Resources	Volunteer recruitment/management	14%	3	6%
16	Vision or Mission	Articulating a clear mission and vision	14%	3	10%
17	A&C	Being a convener	10%	2	13%
18	A&C	Policy and advocacy	10%	2	21%
19	Leadership	Succession planning	10%	2	2%
20	Resources	Financial management	10%	2	10%
21	Resources	Fundraising and development	10%	2	6%
22	Vision or Mission	Strategic planning to advance our mission and vision	10%	2	13%
23	Leadership	Board governance	5%	1	6%
24	Resources	Facilities	5%	1	0%
25	Resources	Information technology (IT)	5%	1	10%

Appendix C: Focus Groups

The purpose of integrating focus groups into this process is to generate participants' knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, experiences, feelings and reactions in the context of a group discussion; and identify language and culture of non-profit organizational leadership. Focus groups also helped us to explore the degree of consensus on topics and themes raised in the best practices research, surveys and interviews (Morgan & Kreuger 1993).

Advisory committee members helped to identify focus group hosts. In turn, focus group hosts invited their peers (other directors/CEOs) to participate. Because diversity, equity and inclusion was a major focus of this effort, hosts were encouraged to invite individuals and organizations who had not been in regular conversation with local funders to participate- including grassroots, volunteer-run and community-based organizations, those working with under-represented groups and issues, and organizations led by women and people of color.

Focus groups were held at the following locations:

Table 1: Focus Group Participants by Location (n=88)			
Location	Host	Date	Attendees
Auburn, NY	Cayuga Community Health Network	June 19, 2019	17
Cortland, NY	Seven Valleys Health Coalition	June 18, 2019	10
Ithaca, NY	Tompkins County Human Services Coalition	June 18, 2019	17
Syracuse, NY	InterFaith Works of CNY	June 13, 2019	17
Oswego, NY	Oswego County Opportunities	June 19, 2019	18
Utica, NY	ACR Health	June 13, 2019	9
Total			88

Focus Group Protocol

Participants were asked upon arrival to complete a pre-focus group survey. The aim of this survey was to collect demographic information as well as information about the participants' agencies and their expectations of the meeting.

The majority of participants completed the survey (79/88); exceptions include folks who arrived late to the meeting or neglected to turn in the survey before leaving the meeting.

Table 2: Surveys Collected by Focus Group Location (n=79)		
Location of focus group	#	%
Oswego	18	22.8%
Ithaca	17	21.5%
Syracuse	17	21.5%
Auburn	12	15.2%
Cortland	9	11.4%
Utica	6	7.6%
Total	79	

Participants had offices across Central New York with the highest numbers in Onondaga, Oswego, and Tompkins Counties and the lowest number in Oneida County. No participants reported having an office in Herkimer or Madison Counties (Table 3).

Table 3: Organization office location (n=79)		
Location	#	%
Onondaga	19	24.1%
Oswego	16	20.2%
Tompkins	16	20.2%
Cayuga	13	16.5%
Cortland	9	11.4%
Oneida	6	7.6%
Herkimer & Madison	0	0%

Participants were asked to indicate all of the areas from which their organization draws financial resources. More than half of respondents cited local foundations/grants, and almost half cited fundraising efforts. About 40% cited government agencies, a third cited fees from billable services, and a quarter cited state and national grants. See Table 4 for details.

Table 4: Where organizational resources come from (n=79)		
Source	Count	%
Local foundations/grants	42	53%
Fundraising efforts (events, private and corporate donations, appeals and campaigns, etc.)	35	44%
Government agencies	31	39%
Contract/billable services (i.e. consultancy or contract work)	26	33%
State & national foundations/grants	19	24%

The participants indicated that they primarily served urban regions, followed by rural and regional/no primary location. A small proportion also indicated that their work reached suburban regions as well (Table 5). Note that a few respondents indicated that they serve more than one population.

Table 5: Location of services/ engaged populations				
Location	Urban	Rural	Suburban	Regional/no primary location
Auburn	3	6	0	3
Cortland	1	6	0	4
Ithaca	7	6	1	6
Syracuse	14	1	1	2
Oswego	7	10	1	2
Utica	2	0	0	4
Total	34	29	3	21

Roughly two-thirds of respondents responded "No" when asked if their organization serves/works with racial/ethnic minorities; around 30% responded "Yes" (Table 6).

Table 6: Does the organization serve/ work with racial/ethnic minority populations? (n=75)			
	"No"	"Yes"	"I don't know"
Auburn	8	0	2
Cortland	6	2	1
Ithaca	12	4	1
Syracuse	6	11	0
Oswego	14	2	0
Utica	2	4	0
Total	48	23	4
Percentage	64%	31%	5%

About 79% of focus group participants identified themselves as Caucasian/white followed by 13% African American/Black. Note that several respondents listed two races/ethnicities (Table 7). 79% of respondents identified as female, and the remainder identified as male (Table 8).

Table 7: Self-Reported Race/Ethnicity (n=76)		
Race/Ethnicity	Count	%
Caucasian/white	60	79%
African American/Black	10	13%
Latinx	2	3%
Asian	2	3%
Other/Complicated	2	3%
Egyptian	1	1%
Irish	1	1%
Israeli	1	1%
Jewish	1	1%
Native American	1	1%
Southern European	1	1%
Swedish	1	1%

Table 8: Self-Reported Gender (n=77)		
Gender	Count	%
Female	61	79%
Male	16	21%
Total	77	100%

In response to "what do you hope to gain from today's discussion?" respondents comments followed six key themes: information/ideas, collaboration/networking, share expertise/represent organization, access resources/funding, invited to come and unsure. These themes, and their frequencies, are shown in Table 9. Many respondents listed more than one reason for coming.

Table 9: Why did you come today? What did you hope to get out of today's session - Themes (n=68)		
Information/Ideas	32	47.1%
Collaboration/Networking	17	25.0%
Capacity Building	14	20.6%
Share Expertise/Represent organization	13	19.1%
Access Resources/Funding	9	13.2%
Invited	7	10.3%
Not Sure	1	1.5%

All focus groups were conducted in spaces in which participants were seated around a table or in a circle to facilitate conversation with each other and with the focus group facilitators. The agenda for the meeting began with a welcome and opportunity for everyone to introduce themselves and why they attended the meeting. In order to continue to ease folks in to interactive discussion, the facilitators led the groups in a participatory activity wherein statements were made and participants were asked to agree, disagree, or express that they were not sure/neutral about the statement. Participants moved to spaces in the room labeled with those response options and spoke with others in that space. Each group reported out to the whole group after engaging in smaller group discussions. Cumulative results of the responses to these statements are shown in Figures 1-3.

CNY Non-Profit Capacity Building Study Focus Group Agenda

Please fill out pre-session survey!

Welcome and Introductions
- *Purpose of Study and Focus Group*
- *Facilitator/Research Team*
- *Participants (Name, Organization, Title/Role at Organization) and "Why did you attend today?"*

Participatory Activity: Opinions on Non-Profit Community Climate

### Roundtable Discussion on Non-Profit Community's...
- *Assets/Strengths*
- *Needs/Gaps*
- *How might assets and needs be better aligned and managed? What resources/support would help meet needs and leverage assets?*

### Closing/Next Steps

Please fill out post-session feedback form!

Only 16% of participants agreed with the statement "I have the resources I need to manage my organization without too much trouble most days," and more than half disagreed. About a third were unsure or neutral.

Figure 1: I have the resources I need to manage my organization without too much trouble most days (n=87)

- Agree — 16.1%
- Disagree — 51.7%
- Neutral/Not Sure — 32.2%
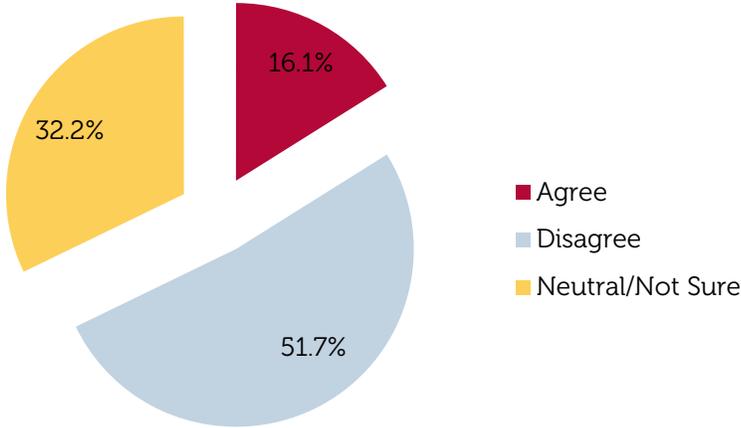
More than half of participants agreed with the statement "It is easy for me to collaborate with other organizations and sectors," and roughly a third were neutral. Only about 7% disagreed with the statement.

Figure 2: It is easy for me to collaborate with other organizations and sectors (n=87)

- Agree — 57.5%
- Disagree — 6.9%
- Neutral/Not Sure — 35.6%
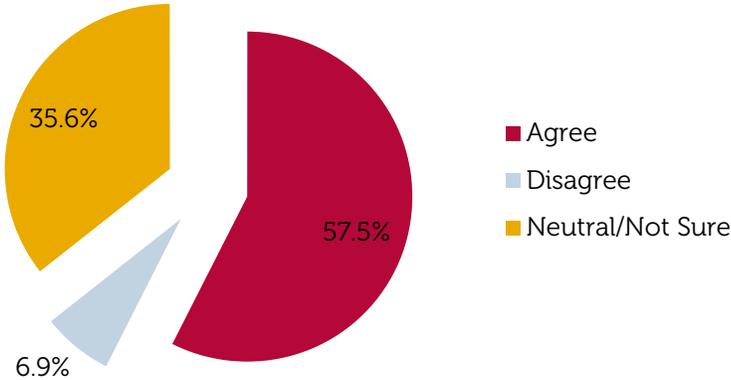
The majority of participants expressed that they were not sure/neutral in response to the statement "I feel that the non-profit sector in my region is healthy and thriving," and about a third agreed.

Figure 3: I feel that the non-profit sector in my region is healthy and thriving (n=87)
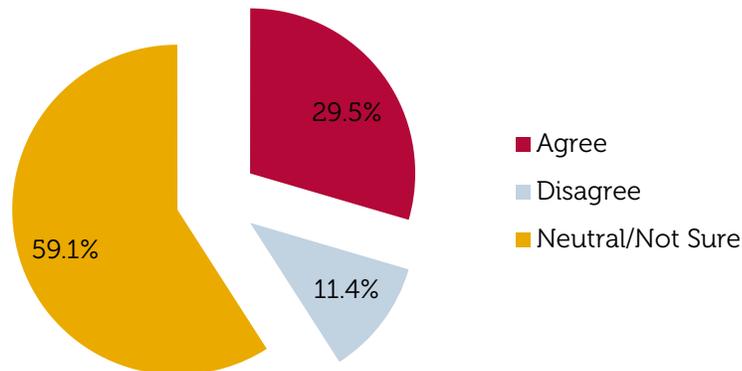
This interactive activity then led into the round table discussion of assets and needs that people experienced in their organizations as well as their knowledge of solutions or resources that helped to address some of the needs. These conversations were transcribed in real time by note takers or audio recorded for later review. Facilitators also used white boards or flip chart paper to capture notes during the conversation, which were used in analysis as well.
.