

About Pennsylvania's Statewide Organizational Capacity Building Project www.pacapacity.net

What exactly is organizational capacity building?

Organizational capacity building is a term that gets considerable use in contemporary textbooks, magazines and newsletters. While there are many definitions offered, this one encapsulates what the Pennsylvania Statewide Organizational Capacity Building Project is trying to accomplish.

"Capacity building" refers to intentional, coordinated and mission-driven efforts aimed at strengthening the management and governance of nonprofits [and governmental organizations] to improve their performance and impact. This occurs through organization development activities, such as leadership development, strategic planning, program design and evaluation, board development, financial planning and management and others. (http://www.createthefuture.com/Capacity_Building.htm)

Why should Pennsylvania's Victim Service Organizations (VSOs) care about organizational capacity building?

Over the past five years, the economic downturn has created an impossible situation for Pennsylvania. Overall tax revenues have decreased but the need for public programs has increased as citizens lost jobs and income. Additionally, the cost of providing services has increased as the costs of things essential to providing services have gone up. For example, funding for domestic violence services in Pennsylvania has been stagnant or decreasing over the last 11 years, while the operational costs of providing shelter and counseling have skyrocketed. The recession and high rate of unemployment, while not the direct causes of criminal victimization, are connected to an increase in both the frequency and severity of reported cases. Nearly 65% of Pennsylvania's victim service organizations (VSOs), both community- and system-based, report funding cuts. Nearly 14% of victim service programs in Pennsylvania have been forced to lay off staff and/or not fill positions in order to keep their doors open. The impact of these funding cuts is visible all around us through:

- ✓ Waiting lists for services
- ✓ Ending of programs

- ✓ Reductions in hours that programs are open for services
- ✓ Forced triaging of cases, meaning some victims just don't get all the services they would like to have

Despite all of this, victims are still coming for services, and for many of them there is no other place to go. Programs AND people are hurting.

It is often helpful to break overwhelming situations into simplified, bite-sized pieces. A good example of this in relation to organizational capacity building is to think of the children's fable of the Three Little Pigs. The first little pig built his house out of straw; the second built his out of sticks and the third built his out of bricks. As we all know, the ability of the three houses to withstand the huffing and puffing of the Big Bad Wolf was dependent upon the strength of the building materials used. In the end, it was the little pig with the brick house that was able to deter the wolf.

And how are Pennsylvania Victim Service Organizations (VSOs) supposed to do Organizational Capacity Building in the midst of all the funding, staffing and service delivery challenges they face?

Over the last 30 years, Pennsylvania has built a strong, professionalized network of victim service organizations that are extremely good at meeting the needs of crime victims as they work to restore their lives in the aftermath of victimization. This includes attending to their need for information and advocacy as their cases move through the criminal and juvenile justice systems as well as providing direct services to help them stabilize their lives after the trauma of criminal victimization.

The succession of funding cuts to VSOs over the last five years has made it evident that quality services alone won't keep budgets balanced and services funded. Leaders in victim services have to understand things like strategic planning, board development, human resources management and fundraising in order to survive. As a matter of fact, the mastery of these topics creates the bricks and mortar needed to withstand the buffets of the economic, staffing and resource challenges that are our proverbial "wolves at the door."

We know that resources are stretched and the time that VSO directors and supervisory staff have to devote to training is limited. That is why PCCD's Office of Victims' Services and Penn State created this project. Now Pennsylvania's community- and system-based VSOs have access to high quality organizational capacity building tools, resources and trainings at low to no cost, assembled in one easily accessible place.

What can the Capacity Building Portal do for me?

This capacity building portal is a virtual library of books, articles, webinars, and listings of available trainings right at your fingertips! It gives you instant access to current information about your program's capacity¹ and a list of personalized training recommendations based upon the needs assessment that your program completed for Penn State. Even better, the information about your program can be used for grant applications, board reports, community presentations, etc. There are also plans to create a component that will provide a way for VSOs to "talk" to one another about issues and exchange ideas and resources.

Each VSO has been assigned

- A unique user name and password (assures confidentiality and gives interactive capability)
- Access to your organization's capacity building assessment results (only you can see them – nobody else, not even PCCD)
- If you have forgotten your password, enter your user name and request a password reminder.

The work that you do with victims of crime is too important for you to fail!

Log into the portal to see all the information available to you today, and take the first step to strengthening your organization's capacity!

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¹ If your organization did not complete the needs assessment tool, it's not too late. Assessments can be completed online via the portal.