Organizational Mapping Tool
FACILITATOR GUIDE

Introduction

This guide is for facilitators of the Organizational Mapping Tool (OMT), a facilitated, participatory self-assessment survey. The OMT provides the opportunity for an organization to consider itself as a whole, asking what works well and what could be improved; it then helps to identify collectively priority areas for improvement and steps for addressing them, all through organization-wide consensus. It is not meant to be a strategic planning tool, but rather provide input for an eventual institutional development plan for capacity building. It is intended for organizations of different sizes and levels of capacity—from small or recently founded to mature and complex organizations. By the end of the process, the organization should have:

- A clear sense of how it sees itself on key aspects of organizational development;
- A short list of highest priorities for institutional strengthening;
- A set of outcomes that would result from strengthening each of these prioritized areas;
- Key steps the organization can take on its own to make progress in each area; and
- A list of specific requests that could be made of a funder in a grant proposal for each area (if appropriate).

Who Participates?

All Staff

The OMT is meant to be filled out by all staff—programs and administration—and, if appropriate, by available board members, since different perspectives are valuable in understanding an organization’s strengths and areas for growth. Some groups ask if cleaning or other service staff should be included. Unless there is a good reason to exclude them, and when in doubt, it is recommended to err on the side of inclusion. If the organization is very large (for example, bigger than 50 persons), conducting the exercise with a smaller group of staff who represent different areas and levels of the organization may work best.

The process is best done with one person who is not an employee or board member leading as a facilitator.
When Should Board Members Participate?

Each organization should decide whether or not to include some or all members of the board (or other governance body) in the exercise. As a rule, board members who can speak to the operational detail of the exercise are the most appropriate participants. However, some organizations choose to have only staff participate. This decision depends in part on whether or not board members have adequate information to weigh in on the topics covered; whether board participation might inhibit staff participation; and whether it makes sense to involve the board in discussions of management issues that may exceed, and in some cases confuse, their role and mandate.

That said, organizations are encouraged to use the OMT as an opportunity for taking a hard look at the effectiveness of their governance. Sharing the results of the OMT with board members—even if they do not participate in the session itself—may also be a useful way to engage the board (or other body) on governance and/or other organizational strengthening challenges.

Facilitators should encourage and may assist organizations to assess the risks and opportunities of board involvement in the OMT and think creatively about how best to engage board members.

Facilitator’s Responsibilities

The external facilitator’s primary responsibilities involve ensuring that the process moves along quickly and comes to necessary conclusions. S/he:

- Encourages participants to think about the whole institution, beyond their program, role or area
- Listens for places where conclusions can be drawn and the conversation can move on
- Ensures that quieter voices get heard within the group
- Leads the prioritizing exercise to conclusion
- Records the conclusions of the deliberations and summarizes the main points of discussion in a final report (found at the end of the OMT survey)

How Long Does the OMT Take?

The OMT exercise has four steps:

1. Setting the context and explaining the OMT (15 to 20 minutes)
2. Completing the survey and reaching collective consensus (4 to 6 hours, including breaks)
3. Prioritizing three items from the survey to work on as an organization (30 minutes to 1 hour)
4. Identifying next steps and resources needed for each of those three items (30 minutes to 1.5 hours)

Timing included in parentheses is an estimate and depends largely on three factors:

- Whether or not participants read and complete the survey before coming together, which adds an hour or more if they have not filled it out previously (both methods are described below).
- How much time is allowed for discussion of each survey item and how easily the group tends to reach consensus.
- Level of detail expected in the prioritization and next steps exercise at the end.

Each organization should decide how much time to invest. A session of four to six hours (with breaks) works well when participants complete the survey on their own prior to the meeting. If the group has not completed the survey beforehand, they will generally need at least a full day. Another alternative is to cover steps 1 and 2 in
one day, and do steps 3 and 4 on a separate day (or 1 through 3 in one day and 4 on a separate day).

**How to Conduct the Exercise**

Here we describe both a “longer version” and a “shorter version,” the main difference being whether or not the participants fill out the survey before or during the meeting.

**LONGER VERSION**

*Survey completed in meeting*

**Part 1: Setting the Context (15 to 20 min)**

1. Welcome everyone and briefly introduce yourself. The organization's leader might want to say a few words as well.

2. Hand out print versions of the survey to each participant.

   **Note:** Some groups are sensitive to the use of paper and will prefer that participants fill out the survey on a laptop, tablet or other device. Facilitators should agree on the best modality with the organization’s leadership beforehand.

3. Provide a brief, initial introduction to the session, including:

   a. An overview of the survey, its purpose and topics
   b. Clarity about the strengths and limitations of the exercise to help manage staff expectations, given that it opens up a lot of issues and needs
   c. A summary of expected outcomes for the day, including a prioritized list of action steps for strengthening the organization
   d. A brief summary of how the day will go, and what steps will occur afterward (when the report will be completed, who will receive and approve it, who will share it with the donor, if pertinent)

4. Answer initial clarifying questions.
Part 2: Completing the Survey & Reaching Consensus (5 - 6 hours)

1. Ask the participants to rank each of the sub-categories in the Mission and Strategy section on their own. Encourage participants to answer all questions even with partial information, but they should leave blank those questions about which they do not have sufficient information to answer. Give about 10 minutes for participants to read and complete.

   **Note:** Participants should be told they can choose to check the circle in between two rankings (as in the circle between Basic and Moderate).

2. Reconvene the group and help them identify a consensus ranking for each subcategory within the Mission and Strategy category that reflects general agreement as to where the organization ranks. See suggested dynamics to help the group reach consensus in the grey box. Some subcategories will take longer than others if consensus is hard to reach. It is the role of the facilitator to strike the right balance between allowing for needed discussion and helping the group avoid getting bogged down in each subcategory (see suggestions on timing below).

   **Tip:** Carefully explain to the group what a consensus ranking is. Suggested language: “What we are going to do now is get a sense of how people voted and then seek to agree on a ranking that reflects the collective opinion of the group. This is not based on a strict tally or an exact average. Rather, first, we will get a sense of the group's opinions and then you will decide together the best ranking. On the
outside chance that we can’t, I will make a note of it in the Comments section.”

Facilitation Tips For the Consensus Ranking

- Conduct a “lightning round” for each sub-category, in which each participant calls out the level they chose, without explanations (for example, “Basic,” “Basic,” “Moderate,” “Moderate,” “Basic to Moderate,” “Moderate,” etc.)
  - Start each round with a different person and change direction frequently
  - After the lightning round, ask “What are people hearing?”
  - Reflect back to them the number of times that each level was named (you can keep tabs of this on a sheet of paper during the lightning round)

- Have participants indicate which level they chose with a show of hands for each level (starting with “Strong”) and those in between (e.g., “between Moderate and Strong”). This is particularly recommended when working with a group larger than 25 people, though it also works well in smaller groups.

- Where you see outliers, call on those persons to share their perspective: “Can you tell me why you scored this as you did?” or “Can someone that marked “Basic” share why they scored it that way?”

- Focus on those who have relevant expertise (for example, the accountant when ranking financial administration).

- It is helpful to have a large and easily visible list of the topics to be covered on the wall and check them off as you go along so that all participants can see how many remain to be covered. This helps with time management for the facilitator, as well.

- Because it’s a long exercise, the facilitator needs to keep the process as agile as possible and include occasional breaks, stretching, etc.

Note: The facilitator has a few options for how to record the consensus rankings and the most salient points of the discussion, which will ultimately be submitted in the report form found at the end of the OMT survey:

- The consensus rankings can be marked using the PDF form on a computer or other device, or by hand on a printed version.
- The notes on the discussion can be logged directly in the same PDF form, or taken by hand, or logged in a computer or other device, not using the PDF (for example, in a Word document).

3. Repeat for each category: the group completes the survey for that category in silence, and then the facilitator helps them reach collective consensus. The group should complete all sections using the consensus process, except Executive Leadership. These questions are more politically sensitive and are often not best discussed collectively.
Part 3: Prioritizing Exercise (30 minutes to 1 hour)

Once all sections of the tool are completed you will start the prioritizing exercise.

1. Ask each participant to go back through the survey (excluding Leadership) on their own and rank what they see as the organization’s first, second, and third priorities for institutional strengthening.

   Note: Participants may focus on the larger capacity category (e.g. Advocacy, Learning and Evaluation) unless they want to specify an issue raised in a subcategory.

2. Then ask each person to report what they ranked as first, tallying on a large sheet or board in the front of the room the individual answers (see Prioritization Exercise Worksheet below as an example).

3. Repeat this process for second and third priorities.

4. Sum the information in two ways:
   a. Overall frequencies (e.g., how often was Communications mentioned overall)
   b. A weighted frequency in which first priorities weigh more than second ones, and second more than third

   Note: To do this, every time a category is considered first priority, it should receive three points; for second, it should receive two; and for third, one point.

   Tip: To move this step along and foster participation, you may want to have someone from the organization help you calculate and/or check the weighted frequencies.

   Tip: The prioritization exercise worksheet in the OMT tallies the weighted frequencies automatically.
Tip: The facilitators may use and later transcribe flipcharts for the prioritization and next steps exercise, writing up the results electronically using the report form at the end of the OMT survey.

5. Ask the group to note trends in terms of organizational priorities for institutional strengthening.

6. Conclude by identifying the organization’s first, second, and third priorities.

Part 4: Next Steps and Resource Identification (30 minutes to 1.5 hours)

Once the group has identified the organization’s top three priorities, the facilitator engages participants in a discussion of next steps.

The facilitator helps the group:

- Identify the outcomes they would want to see within a few years for each of the three priorities (ask participants to answer: for this priority, “what does success look like?”)
- Specify steps they would need to take to realize these outcomes
- Identify follow-up actions for each of the priorities (including persons responsible and deadlines)
- Consider which resources the organization already has to help them realize their outcomes
- Identify those resources that require external support
- If there is time, articulate the request they might make, where appropriate, to a funder in a proposal (this may also be done by the Director or other staff person after the exercise)

All of this may serve as input for an eventual Institutional Development Plan, which may accompany a proposal to a funder, if additional resources are needed to realize the outcomes.

If there is time and the group is large, the facilitator may consider dividing participants into smaller groups to do the work related to next steps and follow-up actions. Depending on time, the smaller groups may report-back to the plenary and/or hand in written recommendations to the organization’s leadership.

SHORTER VERSION

For the shorter version, the facilitator:

- Has an initial introductory meeting with participants to distribute the survey, explain the desired outcomes, and welcome questions, or sends an introductory email to this effect.

  Note: It is recommended to distribute the survey approximately 72 hours in advance of the collective exercise (enough time for the staff to complete it, but not so far in advance that they are likely to discuss it among themselves before the exercise).

- Asks each participant to complete the survey and bring it to the full group meeting. Encourage participants to answer all questions even with partial information, but they should leave blank those questions about which they do not have sufficient information to answer.

  Note: Participants should be told they can choose to check the circle in between two rankings (as in the circle between Basic and Moderate).

- Uses the first hours of the meeting to have the group come up with their consensus answers as described above. Having completed the survey prior to meeting, you could allocate approximately 15 minutes per section. At 15 minutes per section the exercise takes almost 3.5 hours, plus breaks. The rest of the dynamics (prioritization and next steps) are the same.
The advantage of having people complete the survey in advance is that they have more time to read and reflect on their responses, and the in-person meeting becomes more agile.

Preparing the Report

The final report consists of two components: the completed survey, and the report form that appears just after the survey. After the meeting, the facilitator:

- Reviews the survey responses and makes any necessary edits
- Reviews the notes he/she took on the survey under comments and makes sure they accurately and appropriately capture the main points of discussion
- Synthesizes the anonymous comments on Executive Leadership and makes notes about general trends
- Fills out the report form with general information, and information on the prioritization exercise, next steps and resource identification.

Sharing the Findings

With the Organization

Once the full report is complete, the facilitator shares this with the organization’s leaders (as agreed beforehand, usually the Executive Director or equivalent, or the Executive Director and person/s in charge of organizational development) and obtains their approval of the report, making any edits, as necessary. In general, these changes should be minor, either for the sake of clarity, or choosing different words that are more appropriate for the organization’s culture and sensitivities. If the leadership proposes changes of substance or significant clarifications, the facilitator indicates that s/he will include these as an additional opinion in the report, but not change the report.

Note: Where appropriate, the facilitator discusses any significant trends from the Executive Leadership section with the leaders of the organization. Ideally, the facilitator should share this section with the leadership shortly after the exercise (within 24 hours, if possible) and before sharing the report with any other staff members.

With Donors

The report should only be shared with donors with the consent of the organization, after they have approved a final version of the report. As a rule, and unless there is an explicit agreement to the contrary, organizations, not external facilitators, should share the report with donors. When in doubt, facilitators should clarify this with the organization’s leadership.

Additional Considerations

Conflict of Interest

Facilitators may face a conflict of interest during the prioritization exercise if they are in any way a candidate to
provide institutional strengthening support to the group related to any of the categories or sub-categories. Facilitators should be extra careful to avoid steering organizations toward priorities or actions that they, as consultants, can help with, even if this represents a well-intentioned effort to help a group prioritize issues it can most easily address. At the very least, facilitators should disclose and openly discuss this potential conflict of interest with the organization’s leadership and reassure the organization that it is free to work with any consultant and should feel no obligation to engage the facilitator in follow-up work.

**Technology Issues**

*A note for MAC users: The OMT PDF Report Form (at the end of the OMT survey) does not work with Preview (the default PDF viewer on MAC computers).* If opened using Preview, the file becomes corrupted and important fields in the report format no longer work properly. If using a MAC, you must first download Adobe and only use the OMT in Adobe. (There may be a cost for this). This is not a problem for organizations filling out the OMT survey as it only affects the report format at the end, to be completed by the facilitator.

From time to time, the OMT may also experience bugs due to changing versions of Adobe Acrobat and other PDF readers. Before sharing the PDF with the organization and before the exercise begins, the facilitator should ensure that s/he is able to mark, save, change and re-save answers to the survey (checkmarks, comments and the prioritization worksheet).

**Tip:** Facilitators should do a role-play test round to make sure they are familiar with the technical aspects of using the PDF.

**Adapting the OMT for Each Group**

Not all categories or sub-categories will apply easily to all organizations. Facilitators should help groups understand each element in a way that makes it as relevant to them as possible, for example, adapting terminology as needed. As mentioned, groups should be reminded that the tool is flexible and that the goal is to spur discussion and discern the “sense of the group” rather than focus on any specific rating. In some cases, the facilitator—in consultation with the organization’s leadership—may choose to tell participants to skip a particular section if it is clearly not relevant to them. This should be done as an exception, and on a case-by-case basis.

**Tip:** Facilitators should be conversant in the organization’s mission, structure, and programs and consider marking up the form with any notes related to terminology or other opportunities for adapting the tool to the organization’s specific characteristics.

**Tip:** Facilitators should also be aware of any organizational assessment or other institutional strengthening efforts that the organization has undertaken, especially if these are recent.

**Using the OMT with Networks**

The OMT will likely need to be adapted in the case of networks or coalitions, which may take one of several different forms. First, the facilitator will need to determine who from the network will participate (secretariat, one representative of each member organization, etc.)

Second, facilitators should remind participants to “put on their network hat” rather than answer from the point of view of their organization only.

Also, several of the OMT sub-categories are framed more for organizations than for networks. Again, facilitators should be prepared to help groups adapt each element in a way that makes it as relevant to them as possible. Some key examples include:
Mission/program alignment – This question should allow participants to consider alignment of mission and programs across the network to ensure that network members are working in a coordinated fashion toward the mission and goals of the network.

Advocacy strategy – This question should allow participants to consider the necessity of coordinated advocacy strategies among the members of a network and an overarching strategy plan for the network as a whole.

Communications strategy – This question should consider the necessity of a coordinated communications strategy in which the network and its members are agreeing upon key network messages and audiences.

Board of directors composition – This question should take into account that networks may have different forms of governance.

Board/staff relationship – This question should allow for the potential complications involved with the relationships between governing body members and network member staff, as not all governing body members may work directly with staff outside of the network member they represent.

Funding diversification – This question should allow for the necessary differences between the funding flows of the network as a whole and network members. Participants should also be asked to consider the interdependence of the network and its members in ensuring funding diversification.

Sufficient funding – This question should assess whether or not funds raised are sufficient to meet the needs of the network itself and its members for their participation in network activities.

Legal obligations – This question should take into account the varying legal obligations of networks and network member organizations.

Organizational structure – This question should consider that both network structure and network member structure will be critical in determining the overall health of a network.

Administrative procedures – This question should address the dynamics between a network (for example, its secretariat or other coordinating entity) and its member organizations.

---

**Checklist of Decisions to be Made with Each Organization Before You Start**

1. Duration and date(s) of the exercise
2. Who and how many will participate (staff and board)
“Organizational Mapping Tool Facilitator Guide” 2016 by Martha Farmelo and Victoria Wigodzky (based on an original version by Bess Rothenberg), is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

This guide is a work in progress. Any feedback or suggestions for improvement are welcome. Please write to: martha.farmelo@gmail.com and vicwigo@gmail.com.

Original design by Sen Associates