



Organizing
for
Change



Moving Towards Organizational Transformation
from the NEA Foundation's
Building State Affiliate Capacity Initiative

October 2016 • No. 14

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About the NEA Foundation's Building State Affiliate Capacity Initiative

The landscape of public education continues to change, with significant changes in the composition of the educator workforce and student demographics and a dynamic, global world that requires today's students to master 21st century skills. As the landscape shifts, so do the needs of the educators that NEA serves. The NEA Foundation's Building State Affiliate Capacity Initiative was launched in the fall of 2013 and supported four NEA state affiliates—Colorado, Kentucky, Illinois, and Utah—as they sought to expand their mission and role in a variety of ways. It was designed to test whether state affiliate influence and relevance to both its members and the broader educational community increased by expanding services and building skills in support of the professional needs of educators and their students.

About The NEA Foundation Reports and Issue Briefs

Occasional reports issued by the NEA Foundation provide in-depth coverage and analysis of innovations designed to increase teaching effectiveness and student achievement. Selected innovations are drawn mainly from the NEA Foundation program sites. Issue Briefs provide an engaging snapshot of impactful features of NEA Foundation's collaborative partnerships.

Acknowledgements

The NEA Foundation would like to thank the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the National Education Association; without their support, this initiative would not have been possible. We would like to thank the leadership teams of the Colorado Education Association, the Illinois Education Association, the Kentucky Education Association and the Utah Education Association for their thoughtful and candid partnership throughout this initiative and for the courageous leadership in their approach to change. We are also grateful for the efforts of Dan Burkhalter and Liz Dunning, lead Foundation contributors to this report, as well as Meg Porta, Nancy Moll, and Edith Wooten for their guidance throughout this initiative.

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Introduction

At the national, state, and local level, the work to align union activities with issues of teaching and learning that began with Bob Chase’s call for “new unionism” in the 1990s is reaching something of a tipping point.

In the face of redoubled political challenges, unions at all levels are creating a new value proposition for members by emphasizing their leadership role in issues of teaching and learning. Doing so would have demonstrable value even in a world in which unions faced no challenges—polling has consistently placed teaching and learning among members’ top priorities for decades. In the face of political opposition, this transformational shift to encompass professional advocacy in concert with traditional organizing strategies becomes all the more critical to build and maintain coalitions of parents, business leaders, and other stakeholders. It also serves to reinforce the legitimacy of the teaching profession and the organizations that represent it at a time when both are being consistently undermined.

For the past several years, the NEA Foundation has focused its efforts on transformational change through a partnership with four state affiliates. With support from a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the *Building State Capacity Initiative* launched in 2013. Building on its decade-long work with local affiliates across the country through the *Closing the Achievement Gaps Initiative* and *Institute for Innovation in Teaching and Learning*, the Foundation supported leaders in Colorado, Kentucky, Illinois, and Utah as they worked to realign their organizations, leadership, and staff to meet a broad range of needs focused on teaching and learning.

The state affiliates that have begun this transformational work quickly realized that it involves more than a shift in priorities or the creation of a new strategic plan. Realigning efforts around the needs of professional advocacy requires an intensive focus on organizational management—a careful look at how broad cross-sector principles for operating complex organizations apply to the specific needs and challenges faced by each state affiliate, each of which has had to assess and determine how best to proceed given its own unique organizational structure, priorities, and political climate.

For the participating affiliates, engaging in this work required developing new skill sets and competencies that allowed leaders to look inward and gauge the health and capacities of the organizations they lead. It involved a change in mindset about how their organizations are structured and their efforts prioritized. It involved making difficult decisions about what to focus on in the face of limited resources. It required new strategies for outreach and field operations. Above all, it required time, patience, and persistence.

The results to date in the affiliates have been impressive—stronger engagement with locals and members, new coalitions to fight legislative attacks on public education, and professional learning offerings that are strengthening teaching and learning. This report’s sister publication, *Organizing for Change: A Road Map for Organizational Transformation and Lessons Learned from the NEA Foundation’s Initiative for Building State Affiliate Capacity*, focuses in detail on the specific efforts and challenges faced by these four affiliates, along with lessons learned that will benefit others preparing to engage in this important work.

This report focuses instead on providing other state leaders committed to the important work of organizational transformation a road map of how to get started—and what to expect as efforts intensify. No two affiliates or the needs of their members are alike, so the focus of this document is deliberately open-ended. It emphasizes a framework through which affiliate leaders can assess and begin efforts to transform their organizations to better serve professional advocacy, in whatever form those leaders determine is the best way to meet the needs of their members, schools, and students.

The timing is opportune. While the immediate threat posed by *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association* is on hold at the time of this publication, the recent passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act provides a redoubled emphasis on policy and practice at the state level. This shift presents an unprecedented opportunity for professional advocacy and educational leadership that affiliates should seize. It is our hope that this report will provide their leaders with a tool kit to help them do so.

Organizational Development and Unions: What We Know

Organizational development—an area of leadership focus in companies, governments, and organizations of all sizes—has evolved into something of an art and a science. In the broadest terms, the goal of organizational development is to develop and sustain internal capacity to perform well, as well as to learn, adapt, and evolve over time.

These characteristics, often described as *organizational health*, are the hallmark of effective organizations in all fields. Research has shown that organizations with high levels of organizational health are more productive, more able to respond to external change, and more likely to hold on to high-performing employees.

How does this approach apply to unions, and more specifically, to state affiliates? The premise that has driven the Building State Capacity Initiative from the onset is that organizational health provides affiliates and their leaders with the lens through which to make—and execute—decisions aligned with what matters most to the organization, its locals, and, ultimately, its members. Here’s why the principles of organizational development matter for affiliates:

Building organizational capacity. Affiliate leaders are typically highly effective educators, advocates, organizers, and bargainers, but their professional backgrounds don’t always include large-scale organizational management. The process of assessing and addressing deficits in organizational health can build capacity at all levels of the affiliate as efforts expand from the core leadership to encompass staff and, ultimately, members.

Shifting traditional mindsets. The culture of unions and affiliates is (rightfully) steeped in the value of equity—that all people, and all things, have equal value. In a time of limited and often diminishing resources, however, that focus on equity can be maintained only if affiliate leaders prioritize the efforts of their organization in a systematic way. The era of an education association at any level being half-jokingly referred to as the “everything association” is over, and leaders must adapt their decision-making processes accordingly.

Untying structural knots. Another common characteristic of affiliates is the proliferation of overlapping boards, committees, and other decision-making structures. Organizational management provides affiliate leadership with a toolbox to assess these structures and determine the best ways of balancing decision-making and member involvement.

Assessing external stakeholders. In much the same fashion as an internal analysis of organizational structures can help improve decision-making, an external assessment of allies, potential adversaries, and strategic opportunities can help develop strategies to accomplish goals with the help of key stakeholders. Affiliates have even used these strategies to identify ways to work with traditional political adversaries on narrowly defined but shared goals.

Balancing proactive and reactive actions. Affiliate leadership often must pivot their personal attention and the priorities of the organization due to unexpected changes in the legislative landscape or other external factors. The process of creating and developing a shared organizational mission and values detailed later in this report can empower staff at all levels to maintain a focus on overarching priorities, even as shorter-term challenges are addressed.

Acknowledging the unique context each affiliate faces. Organizational development typically avoids wholesale duplication of the actions of peer organizations. Instead, it recognizes that while promising strategies can—and should—be studied and adopted, the ways in which they’re put into place are highly specific. Because no two affiliates and their members, climate, and context are alike, the strategies outlined in the pages that follow focus less on specific goals and more on a path that affiliate leaders can follow to begin determining the best course of actions in their states. This work must begin at the top, and the section that follows describes the important role an affiliate’s top leaders must play in organizational change.

Getting Started

Organizational change is challenging work that must be sustained and supported over time. It also requires buy-in from leaders and managers at all levels of the organization, a gradual but absolutely essential process that begins at the top. So this work necessarily must begin there—with the senior leaders of the affiliate.

Senior Leadership

Each of the state affiliates that participated in the *Building State Capacity Initiative* stressed the importance of senior leadership—the president and executive director—being on the same page before engaging in transformational efforts. Given the unique balance between staff and governance leadership in unions, a shared commitment to organizational change is non-negotiable. In organizations of all kinds, the truth of this basic tenet has been learned the hard way, at the cost of considerable time and goodwill.

Within affiliates, the hard reality is that in some cases, this work may not be able to begin without a change in leadership. In most situations, however, the president and executive director are likely to be on the same page, because of the current climate and its potential impact on membership. However, to successfully lead their organizations through transformational change, these leaders must learn how to work together in more effective ways.

The Tough Questions. First and foremost, the president and executive director should have a frank conversation to ensure they share the same vision and willingness for change. The key questions include:

- Do you agree the state affiliate should be committed to issues of teaching and learning as a top priority?

- Are you willing to make significant changes to staff, roles, budgets, and the organization’s strategic priorities to reflect this commitment?
- How will we work together to communicate this commitment to change and professional advocacy and how will we work together as we implement change to ensure it is successful?

Without basic agreement on these fundamental questions, it will be difficult to move forward.

Role Clarity. Even when both the president and executive director are in agreement, it’s critical that they work together toward their shared goals. Doing so will involve ensuring that each leader understands his or her role within the staff–governance structure, and that the two leaders have the shared expectation of mutual respect and support.

Establishing protocols and norms. Agreeing to focus on strengthening the president–executive director relationship is one thing. Making the relationship operational in day-to-day leadership can be far more challenging, particularly as disagreements between the president, the executive director, staff, and other governance leaders arise.

Characteristics Of Highly Effective President-Executive Director Relationships:

- Commitment to joint leadership with role clarity
- Regular communication and meetings that include joint decision-making as an expected outcome
- Understanding of and respect for each other's specific roles (e.g., the president setting vision and rallying governance and membership, the executive director overseeing staff and execution of initiatives)
- Honest, frank communication with each other
- Willingness to speak with a unified voice
- Ability to hold each other accountable

Coming to agreement on protocols and norms can help preserve—and even strengthen—the president–executive director relationship in both routine and challenging situations. Consider agreeing to:

- **Plan regular check-ins and meetings** to discuss challenges and map out a unified course of action. Regular (and frequent) check-ins can help keep larger strategic efforts on track as well as provide time and space to put out fires.
- **Determine how to address disagreements with each other.** Differences in opinion arise in even the best working relationships, so mapping out how you will address them is critical. The key point: Disagreements should be addressed in private to ensure that the two leaders appear as a unified front as they drive change in the organization.
- **Agree to speak with one voice** to staff, governance, members, the media, the public, and external stakeholders. This is critical to establishing a unified front and building confidence in the organization's overall direction.
- **Hold each other accountable.** The president and executive director should have a clear understanding of what each is responsible for and working on. In regular meetings, they should discuss next steps—and check to see if they have been completed the next time they meet.
- **Be honest.** Honesty is the cornerstone of a strong professional relationship, and is particularly important for the two top leaders of an affiliate. It's also the best way to make each other aware of blind spots, such as the executive director taking on too much without delegating or the president failing to communicate effectively with the membership.

- **Identify ways to support and elevate each other.** For example, the president could give the executive director opportunities to speak to members in the field or build his or her capacity on issues involving teaching and learning, while the executive director could help introduce the president to affiliate and field staff and provide a better understanding of the affiliate’s organizational structure.
- **Model professional behavior.** By following these steps, the team of president and executive director will help build credibility that efforts to change are supported and not just another initiative. At the same time, these norms and behaviors also set expectations for how all staff should work with each other—which in itself can dramatically increase organizational effectiveness.

Coaching

Developing these skills isn’t easy, even in the best working relationships. Many affiliate leaders—and leaders in organizations of all kinds—work with a leadership coach to map out expectations and come to agreement on norms and protocols. Whether it’s as simple as determining

if an email or phone call works best for quick check-ins or as complex as addressing significant differences in communication styles and personality types, leadership coaches are skilled at facilitating agreement and expectations among leaders.

Expanding the Circle

Once the president and executive director have a shared understanding of their roles and how they will work together, additional leaders—both on the governance and staff side—should be brought into the process. We will discuss how to identify and bring together members of a leadership team for organizational change in the next section of this road map, but keep in mind that for this broader group to be effective, it also should establish similar norms and expectations for how its members will work together—and with staff, members, and other stakeholders. Leadership coaching is also appropriate—and recommended—to help establish norms and expectations for this broader working group.

Over time, the example set first by the president and executive director, and then by the leadership team and the other groups that emerge from this work, can create a ripple effect that improves professional expectations and relationships throughout the organization as their circle of influence expands. In and of itself, this can lead to significant improvements in organizational health and help the affiliate carry out the goals established through the steps detailed in the sections that follow.

Mapping a New Course

Once the affiliate’s top leaders have affirmed their commitment to organizational change and established how they will work together to meet that overarching goal, they must bring together a representative group of leaders to identify a shared mission and prioritize areas of opportunity.

It’s important to remember that this leadership team isn’t overseeing a project—it’s leading a *process*. This process begins with an acknowledgment of collective need—the need to change—followed by planning and redesign, and then implementation and execution, as shown in the graphic below.

📍 Three Critical Phases of Work



As affiliates move through each phase, the strength of the five areas of focus will affect their ability to do so successfully.

Transformation isn’t a one-and-done activity. For this reason, the creation of a leadership team committed to change over the long haul is critical.

Establishing a Leadership Team

The president and executive director alone don’t have sufficient time or capacity to drive organizational change. A broader group of governance and staff leaders must come together—first to set the vision and build consensus around change, and then to identify, execute, and monitor progress toward specific objectives.

Identifying the team. Affiliate leaders could consider tapping an existing team or committee to drive this work, but the reality is that this work represents a new approach for most organizations, and as such it would likely benefit from creating a new leadership team as a vehicle for transformational change. While there’s always the danger of adding to a long list of existing teams and committees, one of the charges of this team will be to evaluate those existing structures—and to identify opportunities to consolidate or prioritize them.

The leadership team should be broadly representative of both sides of the affiliate organization—governance and staff. Each affiliate has a different organizational and leadership structure based on its size, history, and local context, so the president and executive director must use their judgment and knowledge of their organization to identify the right people—and the right number of people—to bring into the group. Broadly speaking, the positions to consider include:

GOVERNANCE	STAFF
Members of executive committee	Senior managers
Officers	Managers involved in a broad range of affiliate roles, including:
Other respected leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field managers • Government relations • Communications • Teaching & Learning

Setting expectations and norms. As with the president and executive director, it’s crucial that this newly formed group establish strong working relationships. Along with the norms discussed in the previous section, the leadership team should set specific expectations for how this larger group will work together, including:

1. **A commitment to meet regularly.** The leadership team will focus first on setting the vision, but it must be committed to remain active and engaged over time. Without ongoing meetings to monitor progress and make adjustments as needed, initiatives may falter during implementation.
2. **An emphasis on proactive, not reactive, decision-making.** While affiliates and their leaders constantly find themselves putting out fires and dealing with unforeseeable challenges, within the context of its meetings and actions the leadership team must commit to focus first on the long-term goal of organizational change.
3. **Protocols for discussion and decision-making.** Group dynamics can be challenging, especially when governance and staff work side by side. The group should come to an agreement on how decisions will be made—by affirmation, a vote, or recommendation.

Coaching and facilitating. As with the relationship between the president and the executive director, leadership coaching can be invaluable in establishing these norms and expectations. With a larger group, an effective facilitator also is important in keeping the team focused on its objectives and efficient in discussions and decision-making on an ongoing basis. Consider retaining coaches and consultants for longer-term periods to play this useful role, or training a staff member to serve as a facilitator later in the process.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COLLECTIVE NEED:

Creating a Shared Vision

The first task of the leadership team is to identify a shared organizational mission and values, and then use those values to identify opportunities for change and prioritize which ones to pursue first.

It is the role of the president and executive director to make the case for collective need—and specifically the need for change. The president, in particular, should use his or her role of setting and communicating the vision for the affiliate to emphasize the importance of professional advocacy and supporting teaching and learning—as well as the reality that the affiliate will have to make significant changes in how it does business in response to these new priorities. At the same time, the president must make clear that these transitions represent a shift to include new priorities as part of the affiliate’s portfolio of activities, not an abandonment of traditional organizing roles and activities. Articulating the need clearly to the leadership team helps set the stage for change and provides common language and rationales each team member can use when speaking with peers, members, and other stakeholders as the process evolves.

Since organizational transformation is not a common skill set among affiliate governance and staff, many leadership teams begin with a book study—choosing a work on organizational change and discussing its implications for their work as a team. As with norming, facilitators and consultants can help lead these discussions.

From there, the facilitator can lead focused discussions on the affiliate’s mission and core values. Given the emphasis on professional advocacy, the facilitator may introduce a statement such as “being the leading expert on public education in our state” and elicit discussion on what it would look like if the affiliate were truly living that value. Some examples of values stemming from professional advocacy include:

- *“The union and its leaders have relationships with the state education agency or education-focused lawmakers that enable them to influence state education policy in a way that positively affects educators and students.”*
- *“The union provides focused professional development that helps our members do a better job teaching, and that members view as a core value of union membership.”*
- *“The union and its members are known as advocates for children, particularly those in poverty or with special needs, throughout the state.”*

At this point, the goal isn’t to identify specific strategies, but to think big about the values the affiliate wants to be known for by its membership, lawmakers, parents, and the public as a whole. The more challenging work follows next.

Planning and Redesign

Once the leadership team has come to consensus around these kinds of aspirational values, the next step is determining how to get there. Doing so involves identifying areas of need, prioritizing the most important areas of improvement, and developing plans to address them.

Identifying Areas of Need With Gaps Analysis

For most if not all affiliates, shifting priorities to accommodate new values and priorities will require more than just moving around boxes on the organizational chart. It requires significant changes in budget, staffing, and the day-to-day operations of the affiliates and the people who work for it.

Affiliates frequently begin by assessing the extent to which these kinds of changes will be needed by conducting a gaps analysis. The goal of this analysis is to take a deep look at the current structure and activities of the affiliate and identify where changes are needed to meet its newly articulated aspirational goals. Gaps analysis typically involves the following components:

- Interviews of staff, members, and other stakeholders
- Self-assessments completed by staff and governance leadership
- Reviews of internal documents, including budgets, strategic plans, and reports

While self-assessment is an important component of this process, it is vital that this analysis be conducted by an impartial party to avoid the introduction of bias or justifications for why things are the way they are. That's why the affiliates that have begun this transformational work have employed consultants with expertise in organizational health to conduct gap analyses. These analyses typically focus on five broad areas, as shown in the illustration below.

As affiliates move through each phase, the strength of the five areas of focus will affect their ability to do so successfully.



Components of Organizational Health

Leadership and Governance. To what extent are the board, president, and executive director aligned? To what extent are their priorities clear and responsibilities distributed appropriately? Are these priorities being emphasized throughout the entire organization, including the management team, local leaders, and field staff?

Mission, Vision, and Strategy. Do all levels of the organization buy into the mission? Do they understand the current strategy to get there?

Structure. To what extent is the affiliate prepared to focus on professional issues? How prepared is the organization to respond nimbly to unanticipated changes?

Management Systems. Are leaders and managers cognizant of key priorities and strategies, and have they developed systems to address them? Are those systems being monitored to ensure strategies are being implemented consistently?

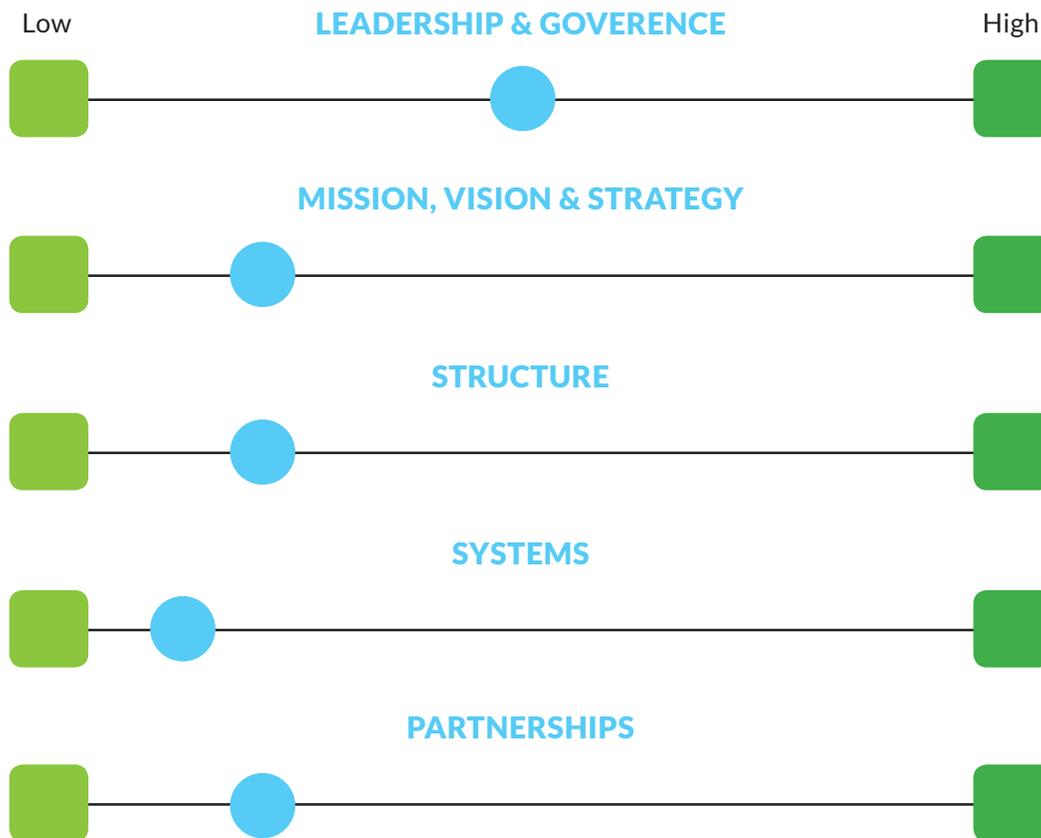
Partnerships and External Relations. Is the affiliate fully leveraging its existing relationships with external stakeholders? Are leaders proactively seeking new partnerships and relationships that can expand the affiliate’s scope and relevance?

Together, these attributes can be combined with membership trends and financial projections to assess the affiliate’s overall organizational health.

For each of these areas, the gaps analysis can identify areas of strength, opportunities for improvement, and—if conducted by a consultant with understanding of other affiliates and their practices—examples of strategies other organizations have undertaken to address areas of improvement.

It’s important to note that even high-performing affiliates wouldn’t receive perfect scores across every one of these dimensions. But a reality check is in order: When leaders first begin the process of committing to organizational change, they’re much more likely to identify multiple areas of potential weakness in a gaps analysis, as shown in the image below.

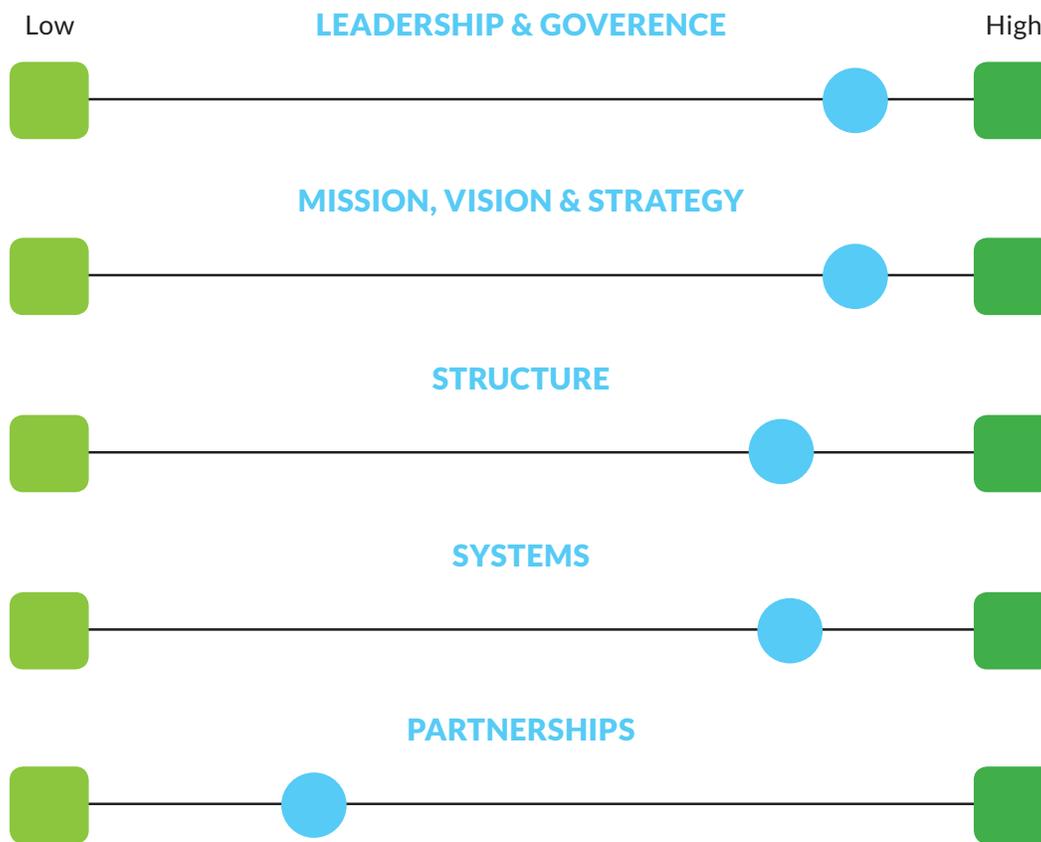
ASSESSING ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH



As this hypothetical example illustrates, the affiliate enters this process with an aligned leadership team that has successfully developed a mission and vision. At the same time, it isn't clear that this new mission and vision has been articulated or understood throughout the organization. Operational changes to sustain the new mission and objectives have yet to be made. And the affiliate's ability to implement and monitor changes represent a significant area of need before it moves forward.

Even high-performing affiliates further along in the transformational process will find areas of challenge. The hypothetical affiliate below benefits from aligned leadership and a clearly articulated understood mission, vision, and strategy. It has restructured staff and operations to address new areas of focus. But it still has work to do in forming strategic partnerships that address key areas of need.

ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH: AN EXAMPLE



This example serves as a reminder that organizational transformation is a never-ending process, and affiliates will need to continue to assess their capacity and identify areas of improvement on a regular basis.

In similar fashion, consultants also can map out the organizational culture of the affiliate and its staff as a whole. Doing so can be helpful to understand internal motivations and assess the organization's readiness for restructuring, as well as the approaches that can motivate staff to buy in to transformational change. For example, a staff that's strongly motivated toward the status quo and resistant to "rocking the boat" will require a different strategy than one whose culture

emphasizes resolving conflicts and seeking consensus from everyone affected by changes before proceeding.

After comparing the aspirational values and goals that surfaced during the initial work of the leadership team and the challenges and cultural realities that surfaced during the gap analysis, the leadership team can begin the work of identifying strategies that can help move the affiliate closer to its goals. For example, an affiliate that aspires to have a strong voice in state education policy that scores low in existing partnerships and external relations may decide to focus on strengthening relationships with lawmakers and SEA leaders. Another affiliate whose leaders want to emphasize field outreach focused

on professional learning that scores low on mission, vision, and strategy may develop a plan to communicate the new vision more clearly throughout the organization and its locals. One with aspirations that are not matched by the roles, skills, and responsibilities of existing staff might focus on in-house professional development. Another with sufficient resources to develop materials to support teaching and learning but limited means to disseminate them across its locals might focus on building technology infrastructure.

The reality, however, is that few affiliates—or organizations of any kind—would find only one or two areas to focus on. Most will see far greater needs in a wider range of areas than they have the capacity to address at once. So the next role the leadership team must take on is prioritizing the needs and developing strategies to address them.

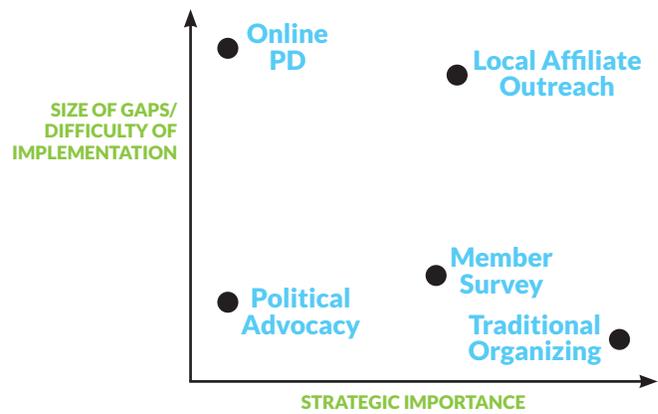
Prioritizing

Making difficult choices about what initiatives or strategies matter most is difficult for any organization. It's even harder for labor unions, which are (again, rightfully) steeped in a deeply rooted culture of equality, equity, and responsiveness to the needs of all members.

Yet prioritizing the work of the affiliate, its leaders, and its staff is a necessity, particularly in an era of stable or declining membership and resources. In fact, one of the strongest arguments for focusing more extensively on issues involving teaching and learning is that surveys have consistently shown that it's the area that matters most for the vast majority of members—compared with the much smaller number of members focused primarily on organizing issues, which is often put, if only anecdotally so, at five to ten percent of total membership.

For other organizations focused solely on market share, decisions based on data like this would be a no-brainer. Not so for unions, which have a core obligation to protect the rights of all its members. However, the leadership team will likely face the need to prioritize a long list of needs and potential strategies required to address them.

One way in which high-performing organizations of all kinds have made these decisions is to map them on a simple matrix, with the importance of an identified gap or proposed initiative on one axis and the difficulty, cost, or leadership capital required to address it on the other, as shown in the illustration below:



In this hypothetical example, we see five affiliate priorities that arose during the gap analysis and the earlier aspirational discussions about the organization's values—creating online professional development for members, outreach to leaders of locals, political advocacy on issues of teaching and learning, traditional organizing and bargaining activities, and surveying members to identify problems with the state's new evaluation system. That's a considerable list for a small central staff and governance leaders who may not even all get release time.

The leadership team of this hypothetical affiliate determined through its gaps analysis that the biggest organizational and financial lifts would involve online professional development and local affiliate outreach. Creating an online system to deliver professional development from scratch would be costly in terms of equipment, service, and training expenses, while strengthening relationships by reaching out to each local leader would be costly in terms of the time and effort expended by affiliate leadership and staff. However, the leadership team identified outreach to locals as significantly more important—at least in the short-term—than creating an online professional development system, meaning that given the affiliate's limited resources and staff capacity, the leadership team would almost certainly decide to focus first on outreach to locals, and only then revisit online professional development once it felt the needs in that area had been addressed.

But it's equally important to look at the remaining three priorities that represent less complex challenges for the affiliate. In this hypothetical example, the leadership team recognized the importance of traditional organizing and bargaining, but it also saw through its gaps analysis that the affiliate is already highly effective in this area. That means that there's little need to accelerate change in this area—but its importance means it should also not be overlooked as the affiliate also begins addressing issues of teaching and learning in more intentional ways.

Conversely, political outreach was seen as not particularly important—perhaps because the political climate in the state is friendly (we did say this was a hypothetical example, after all). The gaps analysis also identified little need to address deficiencies in this area, so it's likely that the leadership team would not focus on this area at all—at least until all its other gaps had been addressed or the political climate changes.

However, there's one important caveat to this prioritization strategy, particularly as affiliates begin transformational work for the first time. There's often value in tackling a comparatively easy challenge at the outset, for two reasons. First, the “quick win” helps build confidence across the organization that change is possible. But equally importantly, teams learn how to work together by actually working. No amount of facilitation and discussion can compare with actually seeing an initiative through to completion, and leadership teams that experience the process are more likely to be able to tackle the difficult discussions and decisions that must be made for more challenging strategic priorities.

For this reason, if our hypothetical affiliate were to choose two areas of focus, its leadership might prioritize local affiliate outreach for the reasons discussed above—but it might wait to get started on that time-consuming and challenging process until after it conducts its member survey. (Such surveys also often serve to gauge membership demand for other, more complex initiatives and identify ways to communicate about them.) And the leadership team also might opt to keep tabs on the affiliate's longstanding and highly effective organizing and bargaining work, in preparation for monitoring larger-scale change efforts down the road, as will be discussed in the sections that follow.

Creating a Plan

Once the leadership team has determined how many initiatives it plans to pursue, based on the affiliate's capacity and the complexity and importance of each initiative, it must turn its attention to developing a plan for each initiative or strategy. And to ensure that each plan or initiative is carried out effectively, the team should consider developing a planning document to guide the process.

Note that this process is not the same as creating a strategic plan for the organization as a whole. Outward-facing strategic plans have considerable value in communicating the direction of the organization to locals, members, and the public, and they often are created by soliciting broad input from these stakeholders. Conversely, these planning documents are internal road maps to help the affiliate and its staff implement specific initiatives and outline the role the leadership team will play in monitoring progress. In fact, affiliates have in the past developed planning documents to map out the process of creating new strategic plans.

With that in mind, leadership teams should include the following elements in each planning document:

- **A statement of the overarching objective** (“We will create an online learning platform to help our members meet the state's new expectations for literacy skills.”)
- **Specific strategies and goals connected to the objective** (“We will add online professional development to our existing member website and develop programming by June 2017; 10 percent of our membership will participate in online professional development within a year of launch.”)
- **Details of how staff and resources will be aligned to meet the objective** (“The existing T&L manager will coordinate the effort.”)
- In the case of areas of need shown by the gaps analysis, an **explanation for how staffing or resources will be realigned to meet the objective** (“\$100,000 will be allocated to develop an online delivery system; one field manager will be reassigned to outreach to locals and troubleshooting in the field.”)

These detailed plans will serve as a road map to guide affiliate managers and staff as they implement the objectives the leadership team has identified. However, the leadership team still has an active role to play as initiatives are rolled out—and beyond, as described in the section that follows.

Implementation and Execution

In most cases, the work of implementing the vision of the leadership team falls squarely on affiliate managers and staff. However, the team has important work to do to ensure that its strategies have the desired impact and reach the intended audiences.

Developing a Rollout Plan

The impact of an affiliate’s initiative is only as good as its impact on its members, either directly (through added services such as professional development or online resources) or indirectly (through effective professional advocacy that affects state policy in ways that matter to teachers and students). As a result, the leadership team must develop strategies to ensure that initiatives reach their intended audience, including:

Information gathering. Surveys and focus groups of members or other stakeholders can help fine-tune elements of the plan and the best way to introduce it to the broader membership.

Communications plan. Especially for member-focused initiatives, the leadership team must determine how the affiliate will relay information about the plan to individual members. Will it engage in one-to-one communication via email or mail? Will it promote the initiative in its publications and on its website? Will it rely on local affiliates to get the word out to their members? Will it introduce the initiative at its annual RA or other events? The affiliate’s communication manager, if not already on the leadership team, can provide valuable insight on the most effective strategies.

Direct outreach. Leadership team members should identify specific individuals to target—for example, specific locals with strong union–district relationships that could serve as pilot sites or, in the case of an online initiative, influential teacher bloggers who can help spread the word organically. At a minimum, the leadership team can make educated guesses about which locals, members, and districts are most likely to be receptive to a specific initiative and focus their initial efforts accordingly.

Anticipating challenges. A big part of organizational change involves untying structural knots. As part of the rollout process, the leadership team should identify potential organizational stumbling blocks and determine how they will address them—both proactively, and as problems arise. This is yet another example of how the leadership team’s work is never done—it must play an active role in ensuring that the strategies it develops actually are put into place in practice.

Monitoring and Adjusting

Implementation is not a one-time process. Just as educators are expected to monitor student progress and make adjustments as needed, the leadership team also must play an active and ongoing role in monitoring the strategies and initiatives it puts into place. The protocols the team should consider for this important role include:

- **Regular meetings to revisit progress.** The leadership team should commit to meet regularly to assess the progress of all of its initiatives.
- **Monitoring metrics.** The specific metrics identified in the planning document (timetables, percentages of members engaged, etc.) should be the yardstick against which the initiative is measured.
- **Collecting additional feedback.** The leadership team also should survey members, conduct focus groups, or solicit presentations or feedback from staff to determine the impact and value of the initiative.
- **Accountability.** The leadership team must hold affiliate staff and management accountable for their performance. It also must hold itself accountable for the efficacy of its planning and responsiveness to member and stakeholder feedback.

- **Making mid-course adjustments.** It may not be possible to anticipate changes to plans in advance, but the leadership team should determine how it will make decisions about significant mid-course corrections, including scaling up or curtailing programs based on the metrics or feedback from members.

Again, it's important to think of the work of the leadership team not as managing discrete projects, but an ongoing process. The team's charge extends far beyond shepherding discrete initiatives from conception through implementation and ongoing monitoring. By creating a sustainable structure for organizational improvement, the team can drive change at all levels of the affiliate, creating a virtuous cycle that improves its overall health and sustainability—and more importantly, its continuing relevance to members and education as a whole in a changing world.

Conclusion

As with all organizations, affiliate organizational health can be the key to long-term sustainability. For unions, a heightened emphasis on professional advocacy around issues of teaching and learning is a key to maintaining relevance in a climate where collective bargaining and union rights continue to be eroded.

This report serves as a road map to think about the process of transformational change without making specific recommendations about what those changes should be. The box at right includes a few common scenarios and the kinds of strategies that are made possible by focusing first on organizational capacity, but they should not be seen as a road map for change. The process itself is the road map from which the greatest needs for your affiliate and its members—and the solutions to address them—ultimately will emerge.

A road map advising you to avoid road maps is an unusual thing. But genuine organizational transformation is far more unusual—and uncommon—than typical efforts to reorganize and restructure. It requires a higher level of commitment at all levels of the organization. The challenges are great, and the responsibilities placed directly on leaders are significant. But when done right, the rewards are nothing less than a stronger, more nimble, and more responsive organization that is fully committed to teaching and learning—and to its members.

Scenarios and Strategies

FIELD TRANSFORMATION

The challenge: Field staff is not aligned with or accountable to affiliate objectives focused on professional issues.

Possible strategies: Create oversight roles, rewrite job descriptions to include professional advocacy, restructure field operations to include specialized roles.

AFFILIATE RESTRUCTURING

The challenge: Affiliate staff roles and responsibilities don't offer sufficient capacity to address professional issues.

Possible strategies: Revise mission, vision and goals to emphasize professional advocacy; develop new staff roles aligned to the vision; identify opportunities for professional growth to help staff grow into these roles

DIRECT MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

The challenge: Members don't feel connected to the state affiliate; more importantly, many don't see the value of union membership as bargaining rights erode.

Possible strategies: Create surveys, listening tours, and focus groups to listen to what teachers want—and then deliver.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The challenge: Members lack professional support or information about state initiatives or changes to curriculum.

Possible strategies: Leverage expertise of in-house staff and members to create professional development that can be distributed online and scaled statewide.

BUILDING EXTERNAL COALITIONS

The challenge: Hostile policy or political climate; attacks on collective bargaining or other union activities.

Possible strategies: Identify stakeholders in public education, including traditional union critics, and identify opportunities to engage in areas of common ground.



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The Building State Affiliate Capacity initiative was supported by a generous grant from: **BILL & MELINDA GATES** *foundation*

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