

CapTrack: Keeping Track of Capacity Strengthening Activities in Proposals

Increasingly donors are emphasizing capacity strengthening (CS) and project ownership by participants and local organizations. NGOs and other agencies are responding by incorporating a range of capacity strengthening activities in their proposals, from increasing individual knowledge and skills to strengthening institutions.

Many projects have multiple partners and include a range of technical sectors. Capacity strengthening activities often involve different configurations of participating organizations, and address a number of objectives and program areas. When designing complex projects like these, it can be difficult to keep track of all the planned CS interventions. But for those activities to complement each other, and contribute to ensuring sustainable project impact, they must be well planned and coordinated.

Consider, for example, a project that includes health training for mothers, and agriculture technical assistance for small farmers, with the intention of improving nutritional status of children under five. Imagine that different local partners are responsible for the health/nutrition and agriculture components, and CRS plans to work with both partners on additional CS activities targeted at their organizations. How can you design for this complexity, ensuring a holistic approach and coordinated and complementary CS interventions, while ensuring a reasonable calendar for staff, partners and project participants?

Detailed implementation plans (DIPs) and Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) plans can help, but activities are usually separated by program objective, making it difficult to look at activities across objectives, and hard to ensure that they are designed in coordination. They are also intended to capture all activities, making it harder to ensure appropriate design of one subset.

Based on this experience, proposal designers and reviewers have identified the need for a tool to improve planning of CS activities. CapTrack was developed to help meet this need.

CapTrack is a complement to other CS tools , including [HOCAI](#), [Assessment-Action Planning](#), and others available on the ICS website (<http://www.ics.crs.org/>). It is referenced in the [Quick Guide to PCS in Proposals](#)—internal CRS guidance designed to help staff design projects with strong PCS elements.

WHAT IS IT?

This tool is a simple table designed to help **quickly and easily** capture basic information about planned capacity strengthening activities, including participants, activity and purpose description, duration, location, cost and who is responsible. Because it is a planning, design and information-sharing tool, it can be used with **incomplete information** and **best estimates**. It is designed for easy use, as a minimal time, low-effort way to improve CS planning and help prevent common CS implementation mistakes.

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WHY DO YOU USE IT?

CapTrack is designed to help quickly and easily **think through** and **coordinate** the planning of CS activities (such as training, mentoring, procedure and policy development, technical assistance, etc), as part of project design processes. This tool is especially helpful with complex projects that involve multiple partners/beneficiary groups and a variety of CS activities, though it can be applied to any project that includes CS components. With available information and estimates, it can be used to:

- Provide a snapshot view of what is planned, where, with whom and by whom.
- Help staff to think sequentially and deliberately about CS activities, to develop a comprehensive and logical plan and schedule.
- Demonstrate to donors, consortium members, beneficiaries and other key stakeholders a project's planned CS interventions, their complementarity and contribution to project sustainability.
- Help to identify and prevent common problems, such as:
- Holding too many CS activities at the same time/place, overburdening staff, partners and beneficiaries;
- Implementing CS activities that are meant to be complementary, in locations too disparate to be effective;
- Implementing too many CS activities at the start or end of the project, so that at the end of the project the results are difficult to measure/achieve.

WHEN DO YOU USE IT?

CapTrack can be used:

- At project design stage, to clarify the CS interventions and ensure they are well planned and coordinated.
- At the time of proposal submission, as part of the proposal package to help demonstrate to donors the quality of the CS intervention planning.

WHO SHOULD USE IT (AND WITH WHOM)?

It is primarily used by those working on the design of a project with significant CS components. Specialized knowledge is not needed to use the tool, but it is important that those who use it have all the relevant information about the CS activities. It can also be shared as desired with partners, project participants and/or donors to keep them informed, and to assist with coordination.

HOW DO YOU USE IT?

CapTrack is easy to use, with rows and columns to capture each CS activity and corresponding key information. There are specific instructions under each heading, and examples are provided in the sample template (below). This simple-to-use tool **can be adapted** in whatever ways will make it most useful. It can be used as a table (per the example below) or as a spreadsheet. Relevant

information from CapTrack should be integrated as appropriate into project management and tracking tools, including DIPs, MEAL plans, Indicator Performance Tracking Tables (IPTTs), etc. CapTrack should be uploaded to Gateway as part of proposal documentation and project records.

HOW CAN CAPTRACK HELP AS AN ONGOING PLANNING TOOL?

While this tool is developed primarily for use during program design, project staff who manage or oversee projects with significant CS components can also use CapTrack during the life of the project, to ensure the continuation of a coordinated and holistic approach. Using it at regular (e.g. quarterly) project review and planning meetings can help with consolidating and analyzing achievement information and considering planning changes for future project periods. Updated versions of CapTrack can also be included as part of the report package to help demonstrate to donors the ongoing quality of the CS intervention planning.

IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS

CRS defines capacity strengthening as a deliberate process that improves the ability of an individual, group, organization, network, or system to enhance or develop new knowledge, skills, attitudes, systems, and structures needed to function effectively, work towards sustainability, and achieve goals. CRS' approach to capacity strengthening has three elements:

- **Institutional Strengthening (IS):** Helping *organizations* achieve their goals by developing systems, structures and the environment needed for optimal performance. For example: Program and management quality assurance; Organizational systems and processes; Compliance and regulations.
- **Capacity building (CB):** Helping *individuals and teams* function more effectively by developing new knowledge, skills and attitudes. For example: Training and peer-to-peer learning; On-the-job training; Exchange visits and study tours.
- **Accompaniment (A):** Consistent follow up to capacity strengthening interventions to ensure mastery of new skills and formalization of organizational changes. For example: Job shadowing; Coaching and mentoring; Communities of practice.

*Note that meetings or working together are not capacity building interventions **unless** there is a planned learning or coaching element in the event.*

For more on Partnership and Capacity Strengthening, please visit the [Institute for Capacity Strengthening](#).

Please [click here](#) to access *CapTrack: Capacity strengthening activity tracking tool sample template*.