



APPRECIATIVE SELF-DIRECTED PATHWAY FOR INSTITUTIONAL REFLECTION & EMPOWERMENT (ASPIRE)

An Organizational Capacity Index User Guide

REVISED OCTOBER 2022

Introduction

As part of the global push to increase local ownership and strengthen independence among civil society organizations (CSOs), Mercy Corps supports local partner organizations to undertake a process of self-assessment and planning based on the **Appreciative Self-Directed Pathway for Institutional Reflection and Empowerment (ASPIRE)**. Formerly known as the Organizational Capacity Index (OCI), ASPIRE has been rebranded to reflect that the intention and the methodology of the tool is to empower partners to take ownership of their own institutional development journey. This user guide offers context for Mercy Corps teams planning to use ASPIRE in programs, tips on effective planning and implementation of an ASPIRE process, and instructions on facilitating ASPIRE and accessing facilitation materials.

ASPIRE empowers and guides local organizations to assess *their own* organizational strengths and weaknesses; this is the most important aspect of the methodology. The ASPIRE *process* – individual



reflection on the organization followed by collectively making meaning out of those reflections – is just as important as the tool itself. This participatory method reflects Mercy Corps’ commitment to ensuring local partner organizations’ ownership of the work they do, and it has proven to be the most effective form of assessment for supporting sustainable organizational development for several reasons:

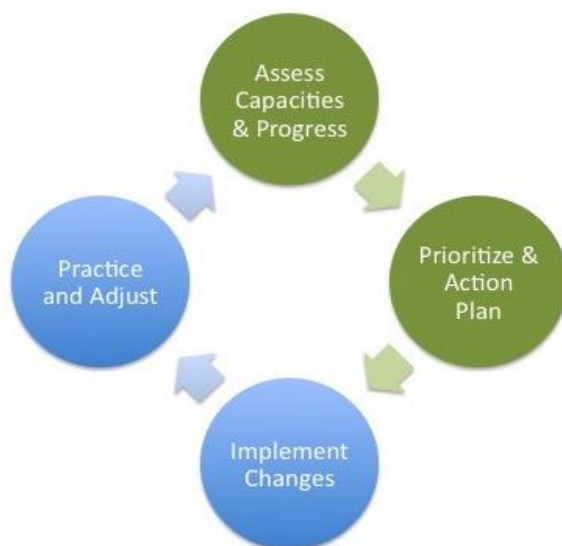
First, the self-assessment **process itself builds the capacity of the organization**. The process encourages and improves engagement between stakeholders within an organization who might otherwise seldom interact. In addition to improving everyone’s internal knowledge of the organization, this cross pollination and sharing of diverse perspectives builds capacities for rigorous critical appraisal and consensus-building. Self-assessment has been shown to increase feelings of responsibility for organizational performance among staff and fosters an organizational culture of self-reflection.

Second, self-assessments identify the discrepancy between an organization’s current capacity and its desired capacity. In other words, **ASPIRE specifically tailors the scale by which an organization is assessed to match the expectations of its members**, in stark contrast to the arbitrary scales used in external evaluations. Organizations often score *lower* on subsequent iterations of the ASPIRE index even as their capacities *improve*; this an encouraging sign that their aspirations for the organization and confidence with self-critique are growing. By internally changing norms, organizations can generate a positive feedback loop of higher expectations, sharper problem identification, and improved organizational capacity.

Third, self-assessments also can better draw upon the participants’ deep longitudinal knowledge of their own organization to produce **more accurate and nuanced results**.

Lastly, the self-assessment process **leads to better outcomes for future capacity development**. Those who self-evaluate take greater responsibility for the outcomes and are more confident about their abilities to improve. This is partially because organizations focus more on building skills and competencies when they set their own goals, while external evaluations orient organizations towards meeting metrics. When people evaluate their own organization, they are more receptive to the results and more committed to taking steps to address the gaps they identify.

FIGURE 1: CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT CYCLE



In our methodology, these next steps take the form of a Capacity Development Plan (CDP), which helps organizations prioritize capacity strengthening objectives. This is part of a regular adaptive learning cycle of self-assessment, planning, and capacity development activities (Figure 1). The elements of assessment and planning in green are the focus of this ASPIRE User Guide. How programs can plan for the blue elements—the implementation of the CDP—is briefly covered below under “Planning for CDP Implementation.”

ASPIRE contributes to Mercy Corps’ commitment to promoting a skilled and well-connected civil society, which we understand as a fundamental element of healthy systems of governance, as reflected in our theory of change for Governance (Figure 2).

Part I: Overview

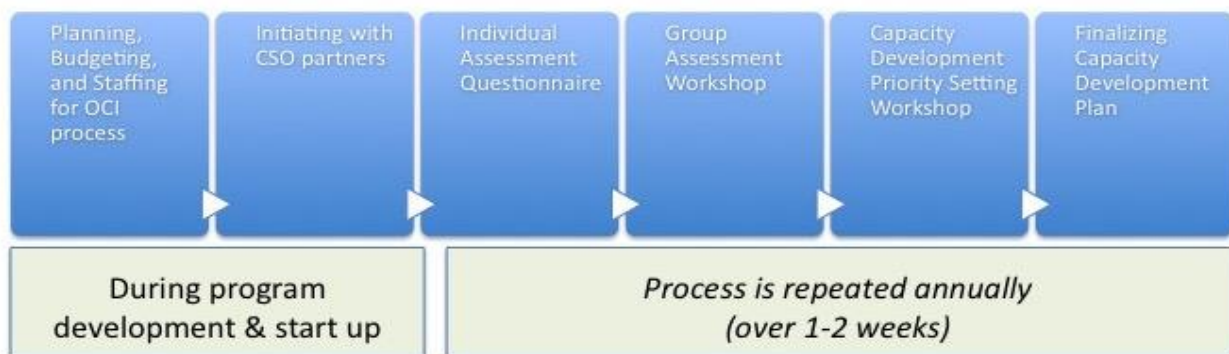
A single iteration of an ASPIRE process fills several days in a one- to two-week period, and usually engages 15-20 individuals who represent all parts of the organization and who are collectively responsible for each of the ASPIRE categories. In some organizations, an entire staff may participate, while in larger organizations the group will just be a representative cross section. The assessment is driven by these individuals, but a non-participant facilitator—often a Mercy Corps employee, especially in early iterations of the process—guides them through the process.

Though organizations must plan and prepare before beginning an ASPIRE cycle (see Part II), the assessment itself begins with each of the participants completing an anonymous **individual assessment** of the organization based on ASPIRE’s six categories: leadership, programs, external relations, finance, administration, and logistics. The aggregated results of these responses form the basis for a **group assessment** workshop where participants discuss the scores and work towards a consensus on the organization’s strengths and weaknesses. With the group assessment in hand, the next step is a **CDP workshop** for participants to collaboratively identify priority areas for improvement and specific activities to address them.

FIGURE 2: MERCY CORPS’ GOVERNANCE THEORY OF CHANGE



FIGURE 3: ASPIRE PROCESS IN THE PROGRAM CONTEXT



The ASPIRE process should happen each year, ideally with the same set of participants, focusing on the priorities identified in the previous year’s CDP. Many local partner organizations continue using ASPIRE annually, even after the end of their program agreement with Mercy Corps.

Why Self-Assessment?

Perhaps the most important element of ASPIRE is its self-assessment methodology. In many ways the ASPIRE process—individual reflection on the organization followed by collectively making meaning out of those reflections—is just as important as the tool itself. This participatory method both reflects Mercy Corps’ commitment to ensuring local partner organizations’ ownership of the work they do and has proven to be the most effective form of assessment for supporting sustainable organizational development for a number of reasons.

First, the self-assessment **process itself builds the capacity of the organization**. The process encourages and improves engagement between stakeholders within an organization who might otherwise seldom interact. As well as improving member’s internal knowledge of the organization, this cross pollination and sharing of perspectives builds capacities for rigorous critical appraisal and consensus-building. Self-assessment has been shown to increase feelings of responsibility for organizational performance among staff.

Second, self-assessments **generate findings that are more meaningful for the organization**. While an external evaluation measures an organization’s capacity based on an arbitrary scale, self-assessments identify the discrepancy between an organization’s current capacity and its desired capacity. In other words, the scale by which an organization is assessed is tailored specifically to the expectations of its members. For this reason, organizations sometimes score *lower* on subsequent iterations of ASPIRE even as their capacities *improve* because their aspirations for the organization are increasing. Self-assessments also can better draw upon the participants’ deep longitudinal knowledge of their own organization to produce more accurate and nuanced results.

Third, the self-assessment process **leads to better outcomes for future capacity development**. Those who self-evaluate take greater responsibility for the outcomes and are more confident about their abilities to improve. This is partially because organizations focus more on building skills and competencies when they set their own goals, while external evaluations orient organizations towards meeting metrics. When people evaluate their own organization, they are more receptive to the results and more committed to the capacity development plans they formulate.

The self-assessment is aided by a facilitator to make the process smoother and make sure everyone’s voices are heard. The ASPIRE tool provided to the organization helps participants generate their own ideas about what to strive for and what to pay attention to in their organization, based on best practices learned through Mercy Corps’ long experience assisting their partners. However, it is crucial for all participants to understand that **ASPIRE is not designed as an auditing or due diligence tool**. Scores do not have external validity outside the context of the internal reflection within the organization; as noted above, it is normal for scores to go down as organizations raise their expectations, become more self-aware, and grow more comfortable sharing these revelations openly. (See sub-section “measuring impact” below on how programs can track progress of organizational development efforts and how the ASPIRE tool fits into this.)

› USING ALTERNATIVE TOOLS

*Partner buy-in and ownership is essential to the effectiveness of ASPIRE. If a CSO has another self-assessment tool they prefer or they are already using, programs can work with the GAP TSU to offer an adapted approach to facilitation and self-reflection, using their existing tools. Partners should also prioritize categories and sub-categories of the ASPIRE tool according to what make sense for them. However, **please coordinate with the TSU to make changes to the excel itself** as various parts of the tool interconnect.*

Part II: Planning and Preparing

The GAP TSU encourages programs to build in indicators, activities, and budget specific to use of ASPIRE and the capacity strengthening cycle from the proposal stage. This sets programs up to use the ASPIRE process and support partners' capacity strengthening process successfully by setting aside time, budget, and human resources from the beginning. Not only that, it ensures that program teams and partners alike are oriented to the importance of partner-led capacity strengthening to achieving programs' long-term development goals. **This User Guide provides general guidance on planning and preparing for, and then facilitating, the ASPIRE process; the GAP TSU can further advise during proposal development.**

As discussed above, the ASPIRE tool is not a checklist that a Mercy Corps team member or one member of a partner's staff can complete alone. The minimum approach is an annual facilitated three-part workshop with a group of 15-20 staff members from each partner organization. (See above for more on the group size and selection.) Ideally, each program includes support for partners' capacity strengthening activities as well. Although each program is different, some general tips are below based on almost twenty years using the tool in Mercy Corps programs.

- A program team member (such as a Program Officer) with technical responsibilities to make any necessary adaptations to the ASPIRE tool, oversee its translation if necessary, coordinate partners' annual ASPIRE assessments, coordinate capacity strengthening, and track progress. They should have an understanding of civil society and organizational development and of the deeper partnership values behind the self-assessment methodology.
- IT capacities required to administer and amend ASPIRE, including computers with excel, and/or devices with internet connectivity.
- Adequate time and budget for annual ASPIRE workshops and related meetings, described below, including resources to cover:
 - Workshop facilitators who are familiar with civil society organizational management and capacity strengthening practices, and who understand the importance of the discussion part of the process. They need to be capable of managing inclusive, interactive discussions on potentially sensitive topics among people with different levels of power and authority within partner organizations and adapting workshop methodologies responsively according to group dynamics. These can be program staff or may be contracted for the purpose.
 - Note takers or co-facilitators who share in note taking; the narrative content of ASPIRE scoring discussions is as important, if not more important, than the score itself.
- The tool should be translated into relevant local languages. In some cases, identifying culturally appropriate terminology for certain concepts will also be necessary, as may adapting some content to the local civil society or program context.

Mercy Corps program's M&E teams are often responsible for maintaining the data that partners share from their ASPIRE assessments. While this is often the best and most practical option, programs and the M&E staff should keep in mind that ASPIRE is part of an approach to providing ongoing technical assistance and capacity development support to partners, rather than a quantitative assessment or monitoring tool. Any M&E usage of the data and analysis should be closely coordinated with the responsible technical lead.

Initiating with Partners

As early as possible in the process -- during the proposal stage, if the partner is already involved, or during program start-up -- Mercy Corps staff will meet with the heads of local partner CSOs to secure their buy-in for capacity strengthening activities. It is important that each CSO's leadership is fully on board – the ASPIRE process, and capacity strengthening overall, is owned by the organization and requires ongoing commitment. This discussion will consist of explaining ASPIRE, the process and the benefits of self-assessment and capacity strengthening. CSO leadership should be clear on each step and the expectations therein.

During this discussion, Mercy Corps explains the reasoning behind the process and our position on local ownership. Mercy Corps staff will make clear that use of ASPIRE itself is not required and that scores have no bearing on the partnership, and explain any program-level expectations around use of a self-assessment tool like ASPIRE and implementation of capacity strengthening activities. At the end of the meeting, the partner organization's leadership should have a clear understanding of the process and be committed to utilizing the results to guide and spearhead future capacity development. They will be set up to identify staff members and to coordinate with Mercy Corps on the self-assessment and planning process when the time comes; see more detail on the process itself in Section III.

It is critical to be upfront and honest with partners throughout the process, starting with the initial discussion with the head of the organization, about what support (particularly financial support) Mercy Corps can provide for a partner's implementation of its CDP. There is a risk of rupturing trust with partners if they believe Mercy Corps will fund the activities in the CDP only to find out later that this is not possible.

Part of this discussion can make clear the benefits of organization's engaging in capacity strengthening. Even if CDP implementation is not feasible due to resource constraints, regular self-reflection makes organizations more equipped to adapt to changing contexts and community demands. Open discussions can also foster employee attachment to the organization, and the accountability and transparency that result can increase community support. Self-reflection and capacity strengthening that results make organizations more efficient and effective in their internal processes and programming.

Between the initial discussion and the beginning of the ASPIRE process (see next section), the head of the organization will identify staff members to participate with input from Mercy Corps staff. In a small organization, it may be most appropriate to involve all staff. Ideally, the number of participants will include 15 to 20 staff members from all levels of the organization. Depending on organizational context, volunteers, members or board members may participate. As noted above, the same individual staff members should participate throughout the process including the individual and group assessments and development of the CDP. Whenever possible, the same staff members should participate every year.

Planning for CDP Implementation

Because ASPIRE is part of a capacity development cycle (described above), programs should plan on providing ongoing support and guidance to partners in their capacity strengthening efforts. How intensive this might be, and what budget and staffing would be required, will depend on the program and the local context and can be explored further with the GAP TSU team. This may be limited to tracking progress partners are making on their own against their CDPs, referring partners to ASPIRE category-specific resources currently available in our ASPIRE library, and assisting partners to secure other support.

It can also include direct technical assistance, mentoring, or training from relevant Mercy Corps departments, coordinated by the Program Officer. It might also include outsourced support and activities; the GAP team’s [work on partnerships](#) suggests that local civil society development institutions should be considered first when identifying providers for capacity development support (including facilitation support if Mercy Corps will outsource this). This allows for supporting local capacity within civil society more broadly as part of program implementation, and also aligns with Mercy Corps’ [newest thinking on civil society strengthening](#).

Measuring Impact

The partner organization and Mercy Corps are responsible together for the ongoing monitoring of success in key capacity areas. Some of this occurs at the level of individual partners’ CDPs and does not require reporting to Mercy Corps headquarters or to the donor. However, each program will likely have indicators related to capacity strengthening included in the MEL plan. (Indicative indicators appear below). In addition, Mercy Corps’ Design for Impact Guide (DIG) includes a Governance and Partnerships Output 1.6.3 “Civil society is increasingly reflective about its own strengths and weaknesses and works to improve its effectiveness,” which aims to measure how many CSOs on Mercy Corps programs are using ASPIRE.¹ Table 1 provides an overview of monitoring and measurement responsibilities.

TABLE 1: MONITORING RESPONSIBILITIES

Institution/team	Areas of Responsibility
Partner organization	<i>Programmatic:</i> Monitoring its own progress against its CDP (ongoing) and the CDP-level indicators (annual re-assessment); coordinating with MC focal point on potential areas of Mercy Corps support
	<i>MEL:</i> Reporting to Mercy Corps against any related program-level indicators
Mercy Corps	<i>Programmatic:</i> Coordinating internally and with partner on potential areas of Mercy Corps support
	<i>MEL:</i> Reporting to donors against any related program-level indicators; reporting to GAP TSU about number of CSOs using ASPIRE

Some donors will expect partners and Mercy Corps program to report net changes in ASPIRE scores as a way to measure impact of capacity strengthening activities. However, as noted above, due to the self-assessment approach, ASPIRE scores are not a valid quantitative measurement. An organization may self-assess itself at a lower score despite making significant progress in its performance. Among major Mercy Corps donors, USAID technical literature explicitly points this out; USAID now has a standard foreign assistance indicator CBLD-9, “Percent of USG-assisted organizations with improved performance” that is designed to capture both the reflective process and outcome of organizational capacity development.²

¹ Along with Output 1.6.1 “Civil society consistently has a clear idea of their critical role as accountability partners in society” and Output 1.6.1 “Active networks of civil society organization, business and governance exist in all program countries,” this contributes to Outcome 1.6: “Local partners are members of active, engaged networks and rely on them to effect change.”

² See USAID Capacity Building Resources: <https://www.usaid.gov/np/capacity-building-indicator-resources>

When donors do expect reporting on ASPIRE scores as a quantitative indicator, programs should be prepared to provide this context and provide alternative ways to demonstrate progress. The GAP TSU can provide support in this area. Some ways that past programs have done so include:

- Demonstrable increase in strategic partnerships or funding opportunities;
- Qualitative discussion with staff or community beneficiaries to gauge changes in performance, perceptions or attitudes;
- Interpretation of qualitative workshop data that provides evidence of increasingly reflective and critical discussion within a partner organization;
- Decreased discrepancy between individual and group scores during ASPIRE workshops, which also demonstrates increased self-awareness and self-reflection within the organization about its capacities and performance.

Part III: Facilitating the ASPIRE Process

Facilitators should be sure to review and understand Part I and Part II of this User Guide before proceeding with facilitation. They contain background on the approach that is essential for effective facilitation of ASPIRE.

Each ASPIRE process consists of four steps. Guidance for facilitating each step appears below in respective sub-sections. Facilitators can access facilitation guidance and presentation materials through the GAP team or on the digital library, and should use Mercy Corps' **ONA online platform (<https://ona.io>)** to store data and manage individual assessments. Facilitators will need to create an account at <https://ona.io>.



An icon throughout this section indicates where technical instructions for using the Excel templates and ONA might be useful; these instructions can be found in the Annex. (*Offline use of the tools is possible; this requires using Excel or printing out the questions. This loses some of the functionality with if/then questions.*)

Mercy Corps has found that many local partner organizations wish to continue using ASPIRE after their program agreement ends. This is a sign of their ownership of the process, and the positive benefits they get from it. They can do so by using the same tools and creating their own account in ONA.

Annual ASPIRE Process Step-by-Step

This section describes facilitation of each of four steps in the annual ASPIRE process. Steps 1-3 take full two days total, as illustrated in Figure 4, followed by finalizing the CDP. If possible based on partner availability, these steps should be continuous.

FIGURE 4: ASPIRE PROCESS STEPS



Step 1: Organizational-wide Presentation and Individual Assessment

During this approximately two-hour discussion, the facilitator will meet with the staff and explain the ASPIRE process, as well as answer questions. (Facilitators can use the [ASPIRE presentation](#) for this step). After the presentation and discussion, each staff member involved will be asked to complete an individual 30-45 minute [ASPIRE Individual Assessment](#) questionnaire in ONA online through an internet browser or on a tablet or smart phones, or downloaded as an excel file.* (As noted above, offline use of the tools is possible; this requires using Excel or printing out the questions. This loses some of the functionality with if/then questions.)



Annex: *Instructions on how to set up the ONA questionnaire; Instructions for participants completing the questionnaire on an Android device.*

The individual assessment encourages staff to begin thinking about organizational procedures and how they impact day-to-day functioning of the organization. The online forum is confidential, thus encouraging open and honest feedback about organizational strengths and weaknesses. Responses to the individual assessment inform the next stage in which the organization will collectively assign a score for each sub-category addressed in the ASPIRE index. Following participant completion of the individual assessments, the facilitator will export the data from ONA into the [ASPIRE Individual Assessment Analysis](#) form to calculate total and average scores for each thematic area as well as visuals to aid in interpretation during the workshop.* (Data in ONA from each year will build on previous years' data.) Please remember to rename the exported excel sheet name as "oci_individual_assessment_final" before uploading it to the Individual Assessment Analysis form, and remember to select the correct ASPIRE Year. (See step-by-step instructions for further details.)



Instructions on doing calculations and instructions on accessing and disseminating the questionnaires are available in the Annex.

Step 2: Group Assessment

The group assessment workshop should take place within a few days of the individual assessment. It will consist of a facilitated group discussion to reach consensus on scores in each ASPIRE category. The main tool for the discussion is the [ASPIRE Group Assessment and Prioritization](#) Excel, including the data and analysis generated following Step 1 in ONA and the ASPIRE Individual Assessment Analysis form (see

above.) Prior to the session, the facilitator will upload ASPIRE Individual Assessment Analysis to the ASPIRE Group Assessment and Prioritization form, remembering to select the correct ASPIRE Year.

All staff members who completed the individual assessment should attend the group workshop and discussion. One full day should provide adequate time to review individual scores and build consensus around the most appropriate score for each of the sub-categories though some organizations or programs may choose to extend this. Table 2 includes a sample schedule. Session timing can be adjusted based on which categories are higher priorities for the partner; this could be determined loosely in advance or agreed within the group during the first workshop session.

TABLE 2. SUGGESTED ASPIRE GROUP ASSESSMENT WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

Time	Activity
8:30 - 9:30	Introduction and Presentation of Individual Assessment Averages and Analysis
9:30 - 10:15	Discussion and Consensus on Leadership Scores
10:15 - 11:00	Discussion and Consensus on Program Scores
11:00 - 11:15	Tea Break
11:15 - 12:00	Discussion and Consensus on External Relations Scores
12:00 - 12:45	Discussion and Consensus on Finance Scores
12:45 - 13:45	Lunch Break
13:45 - 14:30	Discussion and Consensus on Administration Scores
14:30 - 15:15	Discussion and Consensus on Logistics Scores
15:15 - 16:00	Brief Overview of Capacity Development Plan Process

During discussion under each capacity area, the facilitator will share with the group the score that emerged from individual assessments. The group will debate whether and how well the score and its associated definition suit the organization’s actual capacities. The goal is for the group to reach a consensus, through discussion, of what the score should be for each sub-category.

For guidance on facilitating conversations that build consensus -- an important aspect of the ASPIRE process -- see pages 10 – 15 on the Facts-Reactions-Ideas-Decisions (FRID) framework in the [Facilitation Guide for Apolou Catalyse Mobilizers](#). The section on conflict management during facilitation and the “ladder of understanding” on pages 17 – 19 may also be helpful.

The facilitator should ask a lot of probing questions and for evidence including supporting documentation. The role of the facilitator is very important, as an open and honest discussion will be necessary to establish a true understanding of the organizational strengths and weaknesses. This may be uncomfortable for some, depending on power dynamics and norms for speaking freely in a group setting within the organizational and local context.

Figure 5 highlights an example of when a facilitator will need to seek additional clarifications and justifications from the group; it illustrates that while the average individual assessment scores for the “Leadership” capacity area was a “2,” the group initially provided a score of “4.” This could easily result from a group dynamic where people feel uncomfortable openly critiquing the organization or its leadership.

FIGURE 5. EXAMPLE OF SCORING FOR DISCUSSION.



The note taker or co-facilitator should thoroughly document the reasoning behind each of the scores, especially for any categories/sub-categories that are heavily contested within the group. The narrative content of the notes is as important, if not more so, than the scores themselves for organizations to track their progress over time in strengthening internal capacities.

During the final session previewing the subsequent CDP workshop session, the facilitator should prompt participants to consider what categories are most fundamental to the organization’s future success as well as the risks associated with specific capacity categories that have low scores. As soon as possible following the workshop and prior to the CDP workshop, the facilitator should also make available to all staff the ASPIRE group assessment scores and comments notes describing the reasoning behind them.

Step 3: Identifying Capacity Development Priorities

A meeting to develop goals for the partner’s capacity development plan (CDP) should happen within a few days of the ASPIRE group assessment workshop. All staff members who participated in the workshop should help to develop the capacity development plan as well. A half-day session is usually sufficient; Table 3 includes a sample schedule.

TABLE 3. SUGGESTED CDP WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

Time	Activity
8:30 - 8:45	Introduction of activity
8:45 - 9:15	Facilitator presents findings from the ASPIRE workshop
9:15 - 10:30	Produce organizational statements of excellence/weakness and assess level of

	impact on the organization
10:30 - 10:45	Tea Break
10:45 - 11:30	Brainstorm activities that address highest-impact weaknesses
11:30 - 12:15	Reach consensus on top 3-5 activities the organization should undertake

The main discussion materials are scores and discussion summaries captured during the ASPIRE workshop in the [ASPIRE Group Assessment and Prioritization](#) Excel, as well as the “Prioritization” and “Capacity Development Plan” tabs. The “category charts” and “area chart” tabs provide visual representations that highlight both the Individual Assessment Averages and the group scores by sub-category. A facilitator should be prepared to summarize the discussion that generated the scores, which provide important context for the score itself.

Then, the group will reflect on the workshop results to prepare statements that reflect why the organization identified certain categories/sub-categories as strengths and others as weaknesses. Depending on the size of the group, it may be best to split into small groups, each assigned to discuss one or two categories. This should be tailored to the organization, specific, and verifiable, rather than repeat the general benchmarks from ASPIRE. These help to provide a concrete picture of what organizational strengthening will change. For examples, see Table 4.

TABLE 4: EXAMPLES OF WEAKNESS STATEMENTS

Area/Category/Sub-Category	Criteria for a “Low” Score in ASPIRE	Statement of weakness examples
Programs/Technical Capacity/Technical Expertise	Staff is lacking required technical expertise to implement its programs.	Only 1 of 4 program leads at Organization X have professional training in the subject matter. 95% of Organization Y’s new hires are fresh college graduates without applied experience in our field.
Administration/Human Resources/Salary & Benefits	There is no written rationale for salaries or raises; there are no benefits; staff are often not paid on time and sometimes not paid at all.	Staff with equivalent roles and responsibilities in Organization X have up to 50% difference in their salaries. Organization Y paid salaries late during 20 of the last 24 pay periods.

Once that is done, participants should assess whether each weakness has a high, medium, or low level of negative impact on the organization. Facilitators may choose a more structured exercise to assist in this, such as a factor matrix or a voting/scoring activity, depending on the nature of the group. The facilitator may need to prompt participants to think of specific criteria when ranking the level of impact is how the weakness, such as its impact on program effectiveness, community accountability, or organizational sustainability.

For the capacity categories that have been prioritized, participants should brainstorm what activities have to happen to address the highest-impact weaknesses. The group should then reach consensus on what 3 - 5 activities to prioritize. Facilitators and organizational leaders may wish to introduce practical elements to aid

in this prioritization, such as which activities would require outside resources or what type of timeline would an activity need. The “80/20” principle may also be helpful; this helps groups think about which activities will have the biggest impact for the smallest time or resource requirements. The facilitator should record the final decisions on the CDP into the template and share with the organization to finalize, as well as develop an agreement for a follow up deadline to finalize the CDP.

Step 4: Finalizing the CDP

Following the CDP workshop, the partner’s management team or an organizational capacity working group should take charge of further operationalizing the plan with support from Mercy Corps. Once the plan is final, a partner’s management should sign off and should share the final plan back with ASPIRE participants and Mercy Corps, along with a rationale for what was included and what had to be cut.

Questions to consider include -

1. For activities identified in the CDP, what resources will be required? Where will any necessary funding come from? How can Mercy Corps be of best assistance? Is other support available? (For activities that need but do not have funding available – partners can create a “wishlist” for future opportunities.)
2. Who will be tasked with ensuring the activities happen? What accountability measures will be put in place to guarantee that deadlines are met? What is the timeline for each activity?
3. What are the potential challenges to getting this done? Are there internal issues stopping it from happening?

Annual Re-Assessments

A modified version of the ASPIRE process should take place annually, starting with the ASPIRE Individual Assessment Questionnaire. The ASPIRE Group Assessment and Prioritization Tool stores five years of CDPs, making comparison and measurements of success easy to gauge.* The ASPIRE workshop in subsequent years should focus on the capacity categories targeted in the previous year’s CDP and assess progress against the created indicators. Each year, a new CDP should be created based on the previous year’s progress and any restructuring of priorities.



Instructions on comparing past years’ data can be found in the Annex.

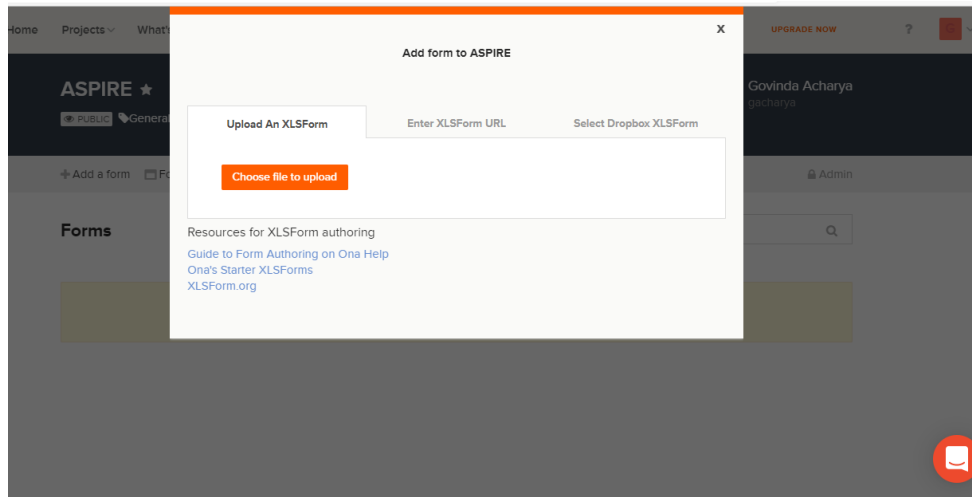
Annex: ONA/Excel Instructions

The ASPIRE facilitator will create an account at <https://ona.io> and access ASPIRE Individual Assessment forms on the [digital library](#).

Setting up the individual questionnaire in ONA

1. Download the [questionnaire and associated materials](#) from the digital library.
2. Upload the excel questionnaire to ONA in the appropriate language.

(As of September 2021, the ASPIRE questionnaire is available in English, French, Arabic, and Nepalese. If you would like to translate to local language before uploading, be sure to build in time and budget to do so, and consult with the GAP team on any contextual or language adjustments to content based on translation.)



3. ONA will display a confirmation message after you have successfully uploaded the questionnaire.

Completing the questionnaire using your computer

1. At the main menu, select 'get blank form'
2. Download the ASPIRE Individual Assessment
3. Have each staff member complete the ASPIRE Individual Assessment and save the form
4. Respondents submit assessment forms upon completion. (If necessary, they can save partially-completed forms and submit them later.)

Instructions for completing the survey using a tablet/smartphone

1. Download the App “ODK Collect” from the App store
2. Once in the application go to “general settings”
3. Fill in the URL with your ONA account (http://ona.io/**username** -- replacing “username” with your account user name)
4. Fill in the username and password for the account
5. Back at the main menu, select ‘get blank form’
6. Download the ASPIRE Individual Assessment
7. Have each staff member complete the ASPIRE Individual Assessment and save the form
8. Respondents submit assessment forms upon completion. (If necessary, they can save partially-completed forms and submit them later.)

Doing Calculations

1. Once all of the respondents’ scores have been submitted to ONA, the facilitator should export the data from ONA and rename the excel sheet to “oci_individual_assessment_final”.
2. The facilitator can then import the results using the ‘load new data’ button.

MercyCorps

ASPIRE
Individual Assessment Questionnaire Analysis

Organization Name:
Type name of organization here

Date of completion:
Type date of completion here

Facilitator Name:
Type Facilitator Name here

Select Year for which you want to see reports:
Year1

Introduction and Background
The Organizational Capacity Index is a tool developed by Mercy Corps' Resilience, Governance and Partnerships Technical Support Unit. The purpose of the tool is to help local partners identify capacity gaps and strengths and work towards improving gaps and capitalizing on strengths in order to increase local ownership and therefore create a more effective civil society. This tool should be used to analyze the results from the individual assessment questionnaire, completed through Formhub (instructions and location of the questionnaire is located in the user guide). After organizational staff members have completed the questionnaire, download the data then click the Load New Data button. For each year that the OCI is used please import data into the same file as it will summarize the organizations progress.

Load New Data

Last Year Imported (to assist with tracking your imports!)
year6

3. Open the Individual Assessment Analysis file. The file will automatically calculate totals and averages for each area, category and sub-category by year, as well as create visuals for easy interpretation. The questions are disaggregated into the six areas and provide averages for each of the sub-categories.
 - o The yes or no questions will generate a tally of positive responses and the questions using a Likert scale will generate averages by question.

Annual Report for Year 1					
Category	Sub-Category	Questions	Question Totals	Question Averages	Sub-Category Averages
Strategic Planning	Mission Statement	Does the organization have a mission statement?	8.0	3.0	2.8
		On a scale of 1-4, how effective is the organization's mission statement in capturing the organization's reason for existence?		2.5	
		On a scale of 1-4, how familiar are staff, members and/or volunteers with the mission statement?		3.0	
		On a scale of 1-4, how familiar are external stakeholders with the mission statement?		3.0	
		On a scale of 1-4, how frequently is the mission statement utilized to guide strategic documents and set organizational priorities?		2.5	
	Vision Statement	Does the organization have a vision statement?	4.0	5.0	2.8
		On a scale of 1-4, how effective is the organization's vision statement in defining what the organizations aspires to become or		5.0	
		On a scale of 1-4, how familiar are staff, members and/or volunteers with the vision statement?		5.0	
		On a scale of 1-4, how familiar are external stakeholders with the vision statement?		5.0	

- o The summary page shows the category and area averages as well as charts for the sub-category averages.

Annual Report for Year 1					
Area	Category	Sub-Category	Sub-Category Averages	Category Averages	Area Averages
Leadership	Strategic	Mission Statement	2.8	3.0	2.9
		Vision Statement	2.8		
		Strategic Planning	3.1		
	Governance	Board Composition and	3.1	2.9	
		Board Governance	2.8		
	Legal	Legal	2.5	2.5	
	Organizational	Internal Communication	3.1	2.9	
		Leadership Team	2.8		
Organizational Sustainability	Organizational Sustainability	3.0	3.0		
Programs	Project	Project Identification, Design	3.1	3.0	3.0

Loading Data into the Group Assessment Analysis Tool

The facilitator imports the ASPIRE Individual Assessment Analysis file into the ASPIRE Group Assessment and Prioritization file by locating the file when prompted on the Introduction page. Please make sure to select the correct year from the drop down menu.

The six area pages in the ASPIRE Group Assessment and Prioritization Tool provide a set of four definitions (that define the capacity of the organization-scored as Low, Basic, Moderate and Strong) for each sub-category. The Individual Assessment Averages will be highlighted in red within the definitions to provide guidance during the facilitation.

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Leadership		Low	Basic	Moderate	Strong
2	Category	Sub-Category	1	2	3	4
3	Strategic Planning	Mission Statement	No written mission or limited expression of the organization's reason for existence (lacks clarity or specificity); known by very few in organization and rarely referenced	Some expression of organization's reason for existence that reflects its values and purpose, but may lack clarity; known by some within organization and occasionally referenced	Clear expression of organization's reason for existence which reflects its values and purpose; known by many within organization and often referenced; somewhat understood by external stakeholders; sometimes used to set priorities and direct actions	Clear expression of organization's reason for existence which describes an enduring reality that reflects its values and purpose; universally known within organization and externally and frequently referenced; regularly used to set priorities and direct actions
4		Vision Statement	No clear vision articulated; little shared understanding of what organization agrees to become or achieve beyond the stated mission	Somewhat clear articulation of what organization agrees to become or achieve; held by only a few, or "for the wall," but rarely used to direct actions or set priorities	Clear and specific understanding of what organization agrees to become or achieve; held by many within the organization and often used to direct actions and set priorities	Clear, specific, and compelling understanding of what organization agrees to become or achieve; universally held within organization and consistently used to direct actions and set priorities
5		Strategic Planning	Overarching goals and strategy is either non-existent, unclear, or incoherent (targets a set of scattered initiatives); strategy has no influence over day-to-day behavior	Strategy exists but is either not clearly linked to mission, vision, and overarching goals, or lacks coherence or multiple major components, or is not easily actionable; strategy is not broadly known and has limited influence over day-to-day behavior	Clear 3-5 year strategy has been developed and is linked to mission and vision but is missing some important components like organizational development, budget, annual workplans or initiatives of focus; strategy is mostly known, and day-to-day behavior is partly driven by it	Clear 3-5 year strategy that is both actionable and linked to overall mission, vision, and overarching goals; strategy is universally known and consistently helps drive day-to-day behavior at all levels of the organization through annual workplans that are regularly reported on

Avoid altering definitions because it can make follow-up more difficult in the coming years. If there is part of the definition that doesn't read properly for the organization capacity, it should be noted in the comment section and the group should drop down to the lower score. The facilitator will manually enter the scores once consensus is reached for each of the sub- category.

1 Organizational Capacity Index Prioritization Tool		Year2						
2	Area	Category	Sub-Category	Group Score	Risk to the Organization	Prioritization Rank (Scale 1-4, 1 being the largest priority)	Comments	
3	Leadership	Strategic Planning	Mission Statement	-				
4			Vision Statement	-				
5			Strategic Planning	-				
6		Governance	Board Composition and Commitment	-				
7			Board Governance	-				
8		Legal	Legal	-				
9		Organizational Culture	Internal Communication	-				
10			Leadership Team	-				
11		Organizational Sustainability	Sustainability	-				
12		Programs	Project Management	Project Identification, Design and Planning	-			
13				Project Implementation and Management	-			
14	M and E		M and E Systems	-				
15			Reporting	-				
16	Technical Capacity		Technical Expertise	-				
17		Inclusion	-					
18	External Relations	Partnerships	Government	-				
19			Donor	-				
20			Civil Society	-				
21			Private Sector	-				
22		Community/ Beneficiaries	-					
23		Advocacy	Advocacy	-				
24	Public Relations	Branding/ Marketing	-					
25		Media	-					
26	Finance	Financial Management	Accounting	-				
27			Budgeting	-				
28			Financial Controls and Inventory	-				
29			Financial Reports and	-				
30		Resource Development	Resource Development	-				
31	Administration	Human Resources	HR Management	-				
32			Performance Management	-				
33			Salary/Benefits	-				
34		Infrastructure	Building and Office Spaces	-				
35			Information Infrastructure	-				
36	Website	-						
37	Logistics	Logistics	Procurement	-				
38			Contracting	-				
39			Asset Management	-				
40			Warehousing	-				
41			Fleet Management	-				
42			Communications	-				

Comparing past years' data

Once CSO staff members complete individual assessment using ONA in subsequent years, facilitators can import data into the same Excel file for analysis.

The correct year needs to be selected from the tab prior to importing data for both the individual and group assessments.

The screenshot shows the 'ASPIRE Individual Assessment Questionnaire Analysis' form. It includes fields for Organization Name, Date of completion, Facilitator Name, and a dropdown menu for 'Select Year for which you want to see reports:' with 'Year1' selected. Below these fields is an 'Introduction and Background' section with a 'Load New Data' button and a 'Last Year Imported' field.

The screenshot shows the 'ASPIRE Prioritization Tool' form. It features a table with columns for Organization Name, Country, Date, Year, and Facilitator Name. Below the table is a 'Load Data from Individual Assessment File' button and a 'Select Year for Comparisons' dropdown menu with 'Year2' selected.



CONTACT

NATALIE C. HILL

Director | Governance and Partnerships

nhill@mercycorps.org

GOVINDA ACHARYA

Senior Advisor | Governance and Partnerships

gacharya@mercycorps.org

About Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.



45 SW Ankeny Street
Portland, Oregon 97204
888.842.0842
mercycorps.org