Learning and evaluation at non-profit organizations, as many of us know, often take a backseat during times of crisis. Many of us have experienced grantees less available than usual for reflection and busier than ever putting out fires, since mid-March of this year. With that, when said crisis is expected to result in long-term economic shifts and the possible significant contraction of philanthropic dollars, service and social change organizations alongside donors themselves are being called on to recalibrate. Strategic donors recognize that evaluative thinking can provide data and frames needed for rigorous and responsible short- and long-term decision-making.

Immediately following the outbreak of the new Covid-19 virus, the Social Venture Fund designed a model for assessing the adaptive capacity of its grantees and applicants, with two main functions in mind: to inform immediate SVF grant-making decisions; and to help support on-going grantee capacity-building efforts. Building on models initially developed at Shatil and...
Sikkuy (see Strichman, Bickel and Marshood, 2007), particular indicators of adaptive capacities (see below) related to learning organization, human, program, social, in-kind, and financial capital have begun to be piloted for analysis in the field by individual grantees and on the aggregate level by fund staff and board members. Below are some examples of questions that grantees have been asked to answer either in writing or short telephone/zoom interviews. Following are the field level questions and a dashboard that fund staff and board members have been invited to use in analyzing the collected aggregate data.

During these uncertain and challenging days, with new and often conflicting data awaiting us at every turn, even the most strategic of thinkers/practitioners may find themselves unmoored. Practical methods such as these, for remembering and utilizing agreed-upon values and standards may be precisely the type of anchor that evaluative thinking can contribute to the field.
### Indicators of Adaptive Capacities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adaptive Capacities</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example Indicators</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adaptive Learning Organization Capital</td>
<td>An approach that values continual structural and operational investment in gathering, analyzing and applying new knowledge as a daily management practice.</td>
<td>Agreeed-upon still-relevant clear vision and mission. Ability to identify and take advantage of internal and external threats and opportunities quickly in ways that may justify activity pivot/adaptation but without mission drift. Familiarity, comfort, and value with prioritizing, recalibration and innovation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adaptive Human Capital</td>
<td><em>Individual unit</em>° skills, strengths and talents.</td>
<td>Quantity and quality of leadership influence. Existence and employment of practical common sense, which includes an appropriate balance of recognizing the severity of a situation while maintaining a healthy dose of optimism.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adaptive Program Capital</td>
<td>Ability to adjust expected benchmark outcomes and strategic activities to address immediate and/or emerging needs of target populations, address new barriers or challenges and/or take advantage of new opportunities.</td>
<td>New target audiences will receive attention, based on existing project model(s). New strategic activities designed/implemented to address new needs/opportunities. Redefined expected measurable benchmark outcomes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adaptive Social Capital</td>
<td><em>Cross-unit</em>°° connections that are more powerful than the sum of their individual parts.</td>
<td>Capacity for and the practical sharing of knowledge and resources. Measurably mutually-beneficial°° relationships.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adaptive In-Kind Capital</td>
<td>Additional° resources that are immediately and critically useful.</td>
<td>The quantity and quality of existing useful technology and the capacity to benefit from it immediately. Quantity and quality of relevant and applicable previous experience and professional knowledge.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adaptive Financial Capital</td>
<td>Flexible Financial Stability of the Project and/or Organization</td>
<td>Ability and commitment to redirect resources immediately to address urgent needs. Quantity and quality°° of budget resources.</td>
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# Sample Questions for Program Grantees

1. Please describe the organizational/program challenges you are currently facing, resulting from the Corona crisis in general and on the relevant program level.

2. What are the ways in which your organization and/or the funded project for which you receive funding have been able to adapt to the new realities in light of the Corona crisis? Tell us if you expect that the work for which you receive funding will, as result of the crisis, likely be:
   a. Continue more or less as originally planned.
   b. Modified. How and why? Please describe any new activities or new expected benchmark outcomes for the funded work.
   c. Discontinued.

3. In what ways, if any, have the changes your team has made in terms of programming been effective?

4. Have you identified any capacity/skill gaps that if addressed would enable you to navigate the crisis more effectively? Please describe.

5. Have you initiated any new partnerships or cooperation with other stakeholders in response to the crisis? If so, please explain with whom and in what ways.

6. Please review and revise the approved organizational/project budget to reflect an updated assessment of anticipated expenses and income for the coming year.

   See below "Additional Analysis Questions".

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### Additional Analysis Questions

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1. Which of the issues that organizations are dealing with seem to be short-term and which seem to be longer term?

2. When looking at the following through a "field lens", where are the biggest/most complex gaps? Where are the strengths? Are there lessons here for replication/expansion?

3. Should we be strengthening the strong (are they strong-enough or are they just stronger) organizations? What might/ought the role of these "anchor" organizations be vis a vis weaker (but still important) initiatives?

4. Or should we be strengthening the weak? What will be lost if these weaker (but still important) initiatives disappear from the map?

5. Is there necessarily a (any?) correlation between an organization's size and its strength? In some (not all) cases we know that larger organizations often have greater capacity to scale, while smaller organizations can often (not always and not exclusively) provide critical local or regional-level solutions. From a "field lens" perspective, what should the fund's approach be in terms of investing in larger and/or smaller organizations?

See below "Additional Analysis Questions".
Adaptive Capacities Aggregate Analysis Matrix

The tool may be used with color-coded or numerical scores, based on standards/criteria of indicator targets as negotiated and agreed upon by staff and/or board members.

5 – Shows **significant** adaptive capacity in this area and/or has taken significant steps to develop capacity in this area. ([dark green](#))

4 – Shows **some** adaptive capacity in this area and/or has taken some steps to develop capacity in this area. ([light green](#))

3 – Shows **partial** adaptive capacity in this area and/or has taken partial steps to develop capacity in this area. ([yellow](#))

2 – Shows **little** adaptive capacity in this area and/or has taken very few steps to develop capacity in this area. ([orange](#))

1 – Shows **no** adaptive capacity in this area and/or has taken no steps to develop capacity in this area. ([red](#))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Organization</th>
<th>Human Program</th>
<th>Social In-Kind</th>
<th>Financial</th>
<th>Average Score</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project 1</td>
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<td>Project 2</td>
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Additional Analysis Questions

The following may be useful to grantee program and/or foundation professionals.

1. Setting Standards: Before looking at the data, discuss and record your ideal targets for project/grantee adaptive capacity in times of crisis. *If/when you decide to adopt a model like this for on-going (post-crisis) analysis, you might want to have the "standards" discussion with the staff/board and/or with an evaluation sub-committee. For right now, for this "pilot", it is fine to identify targets with a smaller, informal team. Best not alone.*
   - Given your mission, should the majority of the projects/grantees be scoring higher (dark/light green) or davka lower (red/orange)?
   - What’s defines strong (dark green/light green), really unacceptable (red) and those projects/organizations hovering around mid-way (3-yellow)?
   - What's a reasonable percentage/number of grantees (keeping in mind that this was really an unforeseen crisis) that receive top, middle and/or low scores?

2. Only after the above, code (number or color, whatever you prefer) the data. Get an Actual Number (N) and % snap-shot of:
   - "Excellent". In the pilot application of the model SVF defined "Excellent" as 5 (dark green), "showing significant adaptive capacity in this area and/or having taken significant steps to develop capacity in this area".
   - "Good". In the pilot application of the model SVF defined "Good" as 4 (light green), "showing some adaptive capacity in this area and/or having taken some steps to develop capacity in this area".
- "OK". In the pilot application of the model SVF defined "OK" as 3 (yellow), "showing partial adaptive capacity in this area and/or has having taken partial steps to develop capacity in this area".
- "Problematic". In the pilot application of the model SVF defined "Problematic" as 2 (orange), "showing little adaptive capacity in this area and/or having taken very few steps to develop capacity in this area".
- "Unacceptable". In the pilot application of the model SVF defined "Unacceptable" as 1 (red), "showing no adaptive capacity in this area and/or having taken no steps to develop capacity in this area".

3. Look at each of the groups (dark green, light green, yellow, orange and red and ask yourselves:
   - Of the grantees in this group, are there any that surprise me with this score?
   - Are there any grantees I would have expected to see in this group that aren't here? What might explain these findings?

4. What are some of the trends emerging here?
   - Are there (and if so, what are) some consistent characteristics of high scorers (greens)? Size? Leadership (hierarchical or participatory style, gender, age)? General vs. Project Funding? Age of organization (including possibly that they've survived past crises)? Type of work? What else?
   - As above for mid-scorers (yellow) as well as lower scorers (orange and red).
   - Is the breakdown here more or less what we want to see? Or should we be shooting for no reds whatsoever?

5. What do these trends tell us about the project/organization/funder's collective "success/progress" in advancing their stated overall stated goals and mission? What about these trends should be considered in immediate and then longer-term programming/grant decision-making? With this in mind, address the following questions:
   - Should you be supporting davka the dark greens? Davka the reds? Why?
   - In what ways and under what conditions should/might you choose to support the yellows? Why?
   - In answering these questions, should you be taking into consideration the expected/probable Corona-related prolonged economic downturn? In other words, should/how should/for how long should the current reality influence the use of this data in making short and long-term decisions about programs/grants?

6. What about this process did you find most helpful? What are some of the MUST HAVE principles? For example:
   - The combination of written report and telephone conversations has provided an important complete picture. With only one or the other of these data sources the picture that emerges is quite different than it would have been. Some explanations for this: talent in report writing (they know or don't know what you are looking for); discomfort/worry on the part of the organization such that they
come across as confused (saying, "we are fine and everything is progressing as expected" and the same time "we've reduced staff by 50%").

- Having a data analysis partner is useful/meaningful and helps balance bias in both directions (when you might inadvertently score too high or too low).

7. Other tips for how to use this process well.

- Teams SHOULD:
  - Use this data and data analysis alongside other on-going formal and informal data collection.
  - Engage and consider the view and analysis of as many stakeholders as possible.
  - Assume that this process can help in making rigorous program/grant-making decisions.

- Teams SHOULD NOT:
  - Assume that this data is the be-all and end-all for decision-making.
  - Ever rely solely on one data source or data analysis partner.

8. Inspired by Preskill & Cook (FSG) and Sikkuy, another helpful angle for analysis may be at different points in time to encourage targeted reflection, as follows:

**Early on during/following immediate onset of the crisis (immediate/short-term):**

- What are the most immediate needs of the project/organizations existing target populations?
- Are there other (new) target populations the project/organization should seek/has been called on to influence?
- What resources (human, in-kind, financial) are immediately available to the project/organization to address the crisis?
- What resources (human, in-kind, financial) are not immediately available (but are needed) for the project/organization to address the crisis?
- What immediate steps can be taken to find these resources?

**After the initial shock has worn off (mid-term):**

- In what ways can the project/organization be proud of its initial response?
- Have any capacity/skill gaps been identified any that if addressed would enable projects/organizations to navigate the crisis more effectively? Please describe.
- What are the characteristics of this crisis that were new and/or especially challenging for the project/organization?
- What were the costs and/or benefits of the immediate steps the project/organization chose to take in immediately addressing the crisis?

**As it looks like the initial crisis is winding down and/or a "new normal" is in site (longer-term):**

- What significant working assumptions about the project/organization have shifted as a result of the crisis?
- Has/in what ways has the project/organization's Theory of Change shifted?
Did the project/organization manage to stay true to its mission and/or underlying core values during the crisis?

Which target population most/least benefitted from the project/organization’s response?

In what specific program areas will the lingering changes (resulting from the crisis) warrant, justify, and/or require on-going new strategies?

How should/will the learnings from above (in both the immediate/short and mid-terms) inform the project/organization’s future planning?

What practices should the project/organization permanently adopt/scale?

What should the project/organization do differently next time?

What can the project/organization share with the field about its learnings?
i Questions, comments? SVF has continued to develop relevant trainings, worksheets and exercises for grantee and foundation professional use of the model and we would be happy to share these practical tools with you. Please don’t hesitate to be in contact with us at jcohen1216@gmail.com and batya@batyakallus.com.

ii Person, project, organization.

iii Between staff members, program alumni, target groups, cross-organizational, sector-wide, cross sector.

iv Resulting in outcomes that would not otherwise have occurred.

v That are not monetary or human resources.

vi Diversity including geographic, sectorial, and commitment levels, general/project, one-year/multi-year/endowment. Additionally, funders may choose to assign standards related to organizational financial sustainability such as: organization has reserves put aside for crises; organization has closed current annual budget at any given moment. Such standards should be agreed upon and set by decision-makers (in all capital areas) prior to analysis.