



# Creating Capacity for Implementation

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The best plan in the world will only ever be mediocre if a borough does not have sufficient capacity to implement it. Paying careful attention to capacity, while creating a new plan is critical for success. It can make the difference between a plan that “sits on a shelf” and one that is actionable and transformative.

Capacity is having enough of the right kind of resources to get the job done. This means that municipalities need to have:

- positions – both internal and outsourced – that align with municipal goals;
- people with the right expertise, experience, and skill sets to fulfill the responsibilities of those positions;
- a working culture that promotes collaboration, communication, flexibility, and resilience;
- structures and reporting systems that support teamwork and accountability;
- up-to-date technology;
- functional and welcoming spaces that inspire trust, confidence, and productivity; and

- sufficient funding for new initiatives.

Boroughs also need to have strong working relationships with other municipalities, businesses, residents, economic development groups, educational institutions, and the non-profit sector.

A borough can initiate and drive development and positive changes in a community, but without the commitment and resources of these partners, the efforts will not have the greatest impact possible.

## Planning

Planning is a great time to reevaluate a borough’s capacity needs. While developing this plan, the borough’s needs, vision, and goals will become clearer.

The actions that are developed for each goal create an outline of the tasks that need to be completed over the next several years.

Plans can be used to demonstrate the need to develop capacity to borough council and state and federal funders that provide additional resources to support

implementation of the plan.

## Prioritizing Capacity

Making sure capacity is a priority should be everyone’s job, not just the borough manager or mayor. All elected officials, commissions and boards, and staff across all departments should recognize the capacity’s importance.

Borough leaders can make this happen by demonstrating their own commitment to building capacity. To do this, they should listen in order to understand the needs of staff, commit to taking a specific, bold, creative action that will address these needs – even if this action only addresses a part of the need – and think ahead and plan to address anticipated gaps and opportunities that are likely to occur.

## Building Capacity

While using the planning process as leverage to build capacity is a practical strategy, taking a proactive, ongoing approach to capacity building can be even more effective.

Anticipating needs, being fully

aware of opportunities, and consistently calibrating resources to those needs and opportunities means a borough can direct its resources to what matters most and successfully overcome the challenges that arise when there are staff transitions, changes in budgets, and other unanticipated roadblocks.

Doing this can be hard, if not impossible, because many boroughs lack the capacity to think strategically.

It's not because the borough staff do not have the ability to think and act strategically. It's often the result of a consistent lack of staff, partnerships, and resources that make it difficult to get past the day-to-day needs of the borough. Unfortunately, a lack of capacity – particularly in smaller municipalities – can seem normal.

Building capacity starts with making it a priority, because without sufficient capacity, a borough will not be able to progress.

In fact, a lack of capacity can lead to miscommunication and confusion, failing to take advantage of opportunities, and making decisions that solve immediate problems but do not favor the municipality in the long term.

Sufficient capacity also includes having a comprehensive understanding of everything that needs to be done, who is responsible for each process or task, aligning job functions with capabilities, and prioritizing responsibilities for optimal coordination and results.

There may be duplication of effort, disconnects in information sharing or access, and/or unbalanced distribution of responsibilities that leave some people overworked and others underutilized. Often a borough can get more capacity just by reorganizing the resources it already has.

Building capacity also takes patience. If a municipality lacks it today, it isn't likely that in the

next month or even the next year will the needed capacity be built.

However, taking consistent steps toward building capacity over time will work to achieve the goals with each step building on the last. Progress must be celebrated without the borough becoming too comfortable with the idea that the capacity is "good enough."

Even if a borough has all of the capacity it needs today, that will probably not be true in the future.

Capacity building is something that needs a borough's ongoing attention. Without capacity, the root causes of many challenges will not go away.

By continually thinking about, prioritizing, and building capacity, a borough can become more attractive to businesses, residents, tourists, and staff; more agile in taking advantage of opportunities for growth; and positioned to achieve all of its diverse goals.

*continues on page 48...*

## CAPACITY BUILDING TIPS

- Make a commitment to capacity, not just in words, but through consistent action over time.
- Engage elected officials, municipal volunteers, and staff in thinking about the capacity needs of the borough.
- Use planning processes as an opportunity to formally evaluate capacity.
- Use community plans as leverage to attract resources that develop capacity.
- Don't use a lack of capacity as an excuse to not build it; take small, intentional steps that align with the borough's priorities.

# BUILDING BLOCKS continued from page 47...




**About the authors:** Sara Hailstone is the founder of Hailstone Economic. She has more than 20 years of community development, business development, and real estate development experience, and

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