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SCCADVASA: A Bento Box Evaluation Framework[©]



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As an outcome of its strategic planning process several years ago, the South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (SCCADVASA) sought to ***create a set of metrics that enables the board & staff to monitor the organization's performance.*** In essence, the organization wished to evaluate the impact of its work, writ large – not program evaluation, but evaluation of the greater whole of SCCADVASA.

This document discusses the benefits and the many caveats of evaluating the work of nonprofits such as SCCADVASA and establishes, in the absence of other models, a unique framework for comprehensive evaluation of the organization – a “Bento Box Framework.”

A bento box is a single-portion meal common in Japanese cuisine. A traditional *bento* holds small portions of all the essential food groups, – fruit, grains, dairy, protein, vegetables - in a divided box that creates both a nutritionally balanced and aesthetically pleasing meal. Just as a bento box provides a convenient and balanced meal, this framework provides a convenient and balanced evaluation for SCCADVASA. In this case, the bento box balances different, equally rational, and sometimes competing perspectives that predict SCCADVASA's success within this one “box” or framework. The box is sectioned disproportionately, allowing us to assign more weight to certain characteristics of success.

Notably, the bento box honors a Japanese eating philosophy called *hara hachi bu*, which says the goal of a meal is to be 80% full. This is analogous to our understanding that internal and external conditions that impact SCCADVASA are constantly changing and that we need to have a constant level of hunger for new information that informs our understanding of SCCADVASA's ongoing success.

This is not a program evaluation, rather it is a system and framework for evaluating the enabling factors that predict positive outcomes of SCCADVASA's work. It is an effective management tool to both inform strategy development and track the progress and impact of strategy implementation, providing a feedback loop for continuous improvement. It is a springboard for deeper evaluation and learnings.

This report is based on approximately 40 key informant interviews, extensive review of the nonprofit evaluation literature, and interaction with SCCADVASA leadership. Along with the Bento Box Evaluation Framework, a baseline evaluation is provided.

Cover art: Getty Images

“Public funders – and eventually private funders as well – will migrate away from organizations with stirring stories alone toward well-managed organizations that can also demonstrate meaningful, lasting impact”

~ Peter Orza, former Director,
Federal Office of Management and Budget¹

Defining and Measuring Social Impact for Nonprofits – What Not to Do

Nonprofits have a responsibility to themselves - their boards and staffs, founders, donors, service recipients, and the community - to measure and communicate outcomes. However, measuring social impact is an ongoing and often discussed challenge. Although sought-after outcomes may be easily defined in terms of the nonprofit’s mission (e.g. fewer hungry children, decrease in teen childbearing, greater access to fresh food), more complex concepts (e.g. increased self-esteem, better overall well-being) can be very difficult to operationally define and measure. Further, it is often difficult to draw a straight line from interventions to outcomes, that is, to demonstrate the impact of the organization on achieving its goals. Thus, measuring social impact is as much an art as it is a science.

There is a contingent of donors or potential donors who believe that nonprofits should be run like businesses. However, this reasoning is a false equivalency. Non-profits cannot run like businesses because the outcomes they seek are completely different. Businesses generate income from customers through the exchange of goods or services; income is their outcome. For nonprofits, it is the expenditure of income (and other resources) that generates their outcomes - social change or making lives better for individuals and communities.

A related misconception is that financial ratios, the percent of charity expenses that go to administrative and fundraising costs, is a proxy for overall nonprofit performance. All resources spent by a nonprofit are interwoven and complementary to program delivery (with obvious exception in the case of fraud). Certainly, not all spending in a nonprofit is efficient; but functional expenses tell us nothing about efficiency.¹ In a 2013 open letter addressed to the donors of America,² BBB Wise Giving Alliance, GuideStar, and Charity Navigator stated, “We ask you to pay attention to other factors of nonprofit performance: transparency, governance, leadership, and results.” In a follow up 2014 letter,² they appealed to America’s nonprofits to “focus donors’ attention on what really matters: your organization’s efforts to make the world a better place.”

Another challenge in social impact evaluation is description-value dissonance.⁵ Nonprofits often produce evaluation reports that use abstract, statistical language from the business and corporate world, but this makes for dry and non-resonant accounting of nonprofit work. The use of business frameworks can cause employees to feel estranged from their own values and the purported values of their organizations. People who work in nonprofits tend to value empathetic, emotional, narrative accounts of impact and report that business language does not support their view that they are helping people.

Current Thinking Regarding the Nonprofit Ecosystem

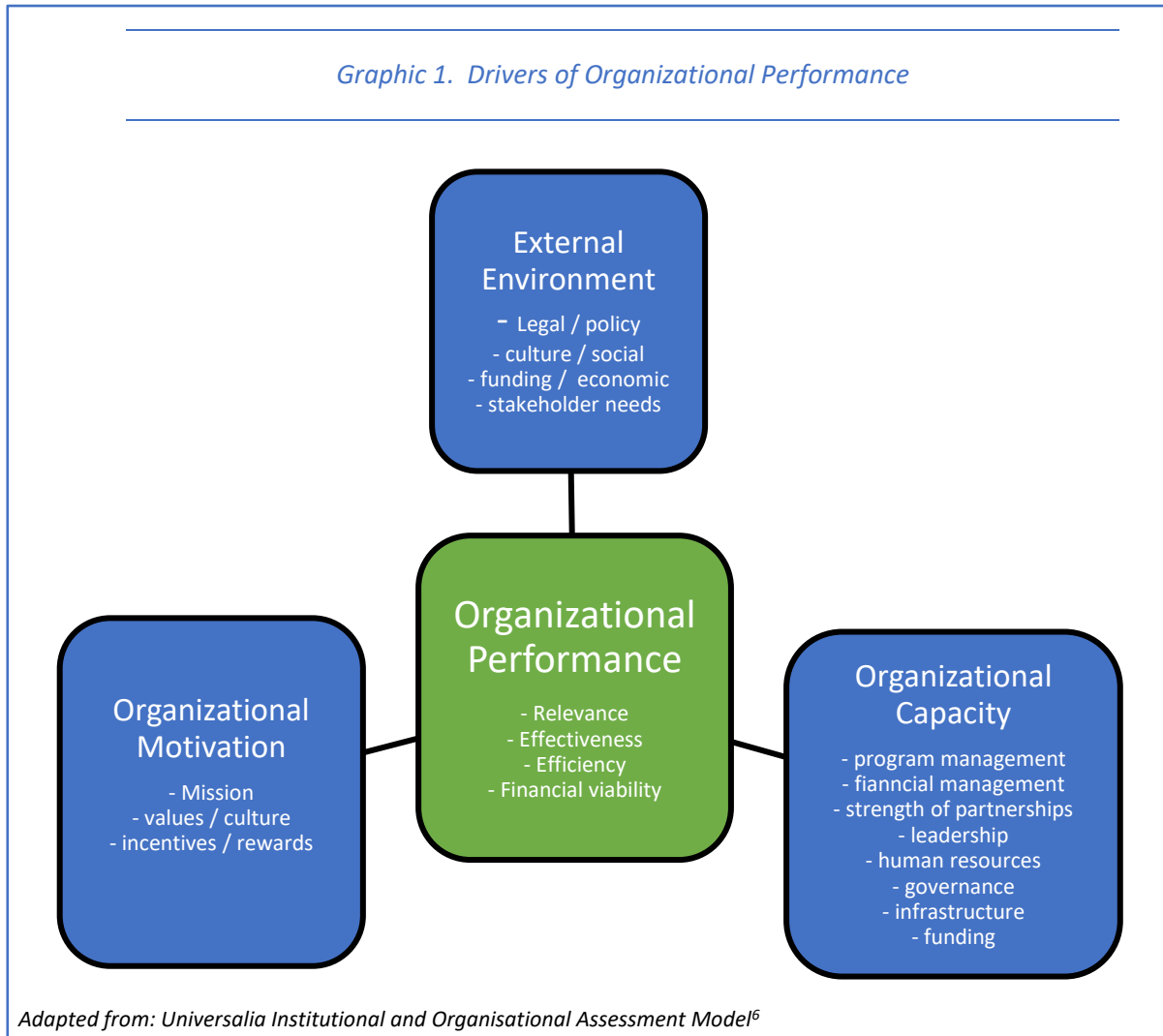
The ways nonprofits go about achieving impact has changed significantly in the last 10 years. National funders and other leaders in the field have identified current best practices, including:

- Upstream focus: more investments in prevention versus intervention. Prevention strategies focus on eliminating or reducing risk factors, whereas interventions mitigate damage after the fact. The notion is that prevention will break cycles so that intervention becomes less necessary, but until that occurs, nonprofits find themselves balancing their work between prevention and intervention. SCCADVASA invests its work in both prevention and intervention.
- Shift from education to policy and systems change: less focus on telling people about how they should behave and why, to changing the systems and policies that shape behavior. Education / awareness alone is a poor predictor of behavior when systems and policies do not support that behavior. SCCADVASA supports education programming but spends a significant amount of time on advocacy and policy change, because leadership understands this potential greater return on investment.
- Multisector collaboratives: partnerships formed across sectors such as health care, housing, social services, public health, employment training and economic development that come together to solve problems that affect the whole community. Complex social issues cannot be understood or addressed effectively through any one sector or discipline alone. Government, nonprofits, and community residents best solve systemic problems together. SCCADVASA recognizes the power of collaboration, or united voice, in advancing its work.
- Equity: the quality of treating individuals and groups fairly based on their needs and differences. This may call on us to make adjustments in the policies that created or perpetuated those differences in the first place. SCCADVASA targets programming and resources to specific groups and populations such as LGBTQ, African-American, Native American groups, and others.
- Shift from investment in short-term self-interest to investment in long-term shared-interest: allows resources to be spent less on remediating problems and more on magnifying collective potentials. Deteriorating wellbeing and inequities result from short-term fixes. Long-term investments generate positive social and economic returns that benefit all. SCCADVASA's focus on changing the culture should drive investments in long-term activities.
- Power of stories: data convinces, stories compel. We are called upon to justify our work with rigorous, credible data, but stories create understanding of the human impact of our work. We need to communicate both – **no data without stories, no stories without data.**

Clearly, these are complex constructs and practices which further challenge measurement and outcome evaluation. Leaders in the world of evaluation have designed good formative and process evaluation tools to assess organizations on some of these constructs; however, there are few output and impact evaluation tools available for the same purpose. Moreover, there is no single evaluation tool that assesses the work of nonprofits across all of these constructs.

Drivers of Organizational Performance

Nonprofit organizational performance is affected by numerous internal and external factors and should be examined in light of those factors. Ultimately, performance is a balance of effectiveness, relevance, efficiency and financial viability. For SCCADVASA, the factors that impinge on organizational performance are illustrated in the following graphic.



Organizations change for several reasons: in response to factors in their external environment; because of changes in their internal resources (e.g., financial, technological, human); and as a result of fundamental shifts in values within the organization, which in turn affect the organizational climate, culture, and way of operating.⁶ Thus, organizational performance will change over time. It is recommended that that SCCADVASA evaluate itself annually as a means of determining which internal and external factors are shifting and how to address them proactively.

Measuring Social Change

At their core, nonprofits are seeking social change, whether through front-line work, advocacy, collaboration-building, funding, or many other activities. A nonprofit's impact, in terms of social change, is the result of a deliberate set of activities, and we know that those activities result in change because we are deliberate in defining and measuring impact. The most common approach to measuring social impact is through Theory of Change and logic models. Theory of Change maps out a nonprofit's path to impact within its particular context. It connects what a nonprofit does (the activities) and its desired goals (the impact).

There are several models for Theory of Change, but they generally comprise the basic components of **Inputs, Strategies, Activities, Outputs, Outcomes, and Impact**. Secondary components such as target audiences, external factors, assets and other predictors and inhibitors of success are also included in a Theory of Change.

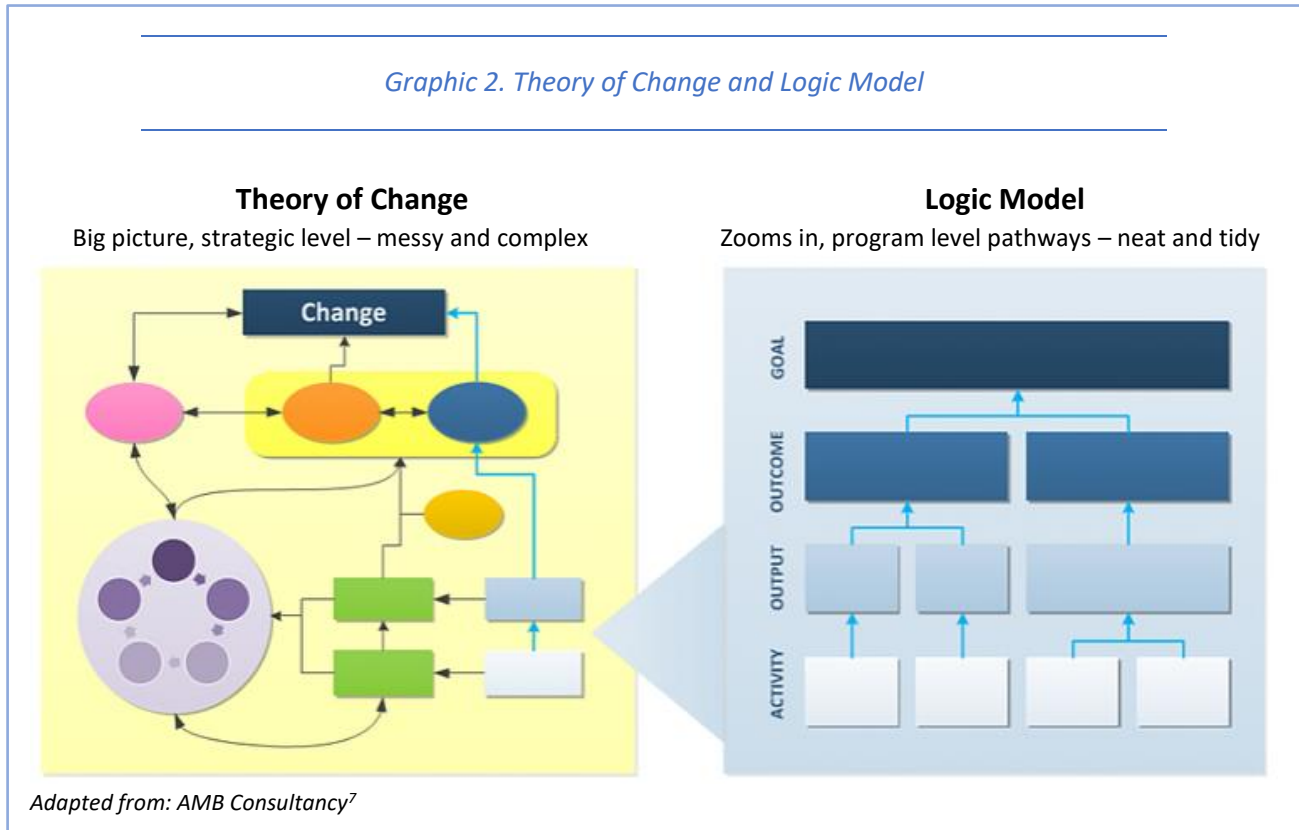
Primary Components of Theory of Change

- **Inputs:** the resources (both financial and non-financial) used to conduct organizational activities. Inputs may include the values and rationale for the approach that undergirds the work of an organization.
- **Strategy:** a plan of action to produce a desired goal. Strategy should remain consistent over an identified period of time.
- **Activities:** the tactics pursued to implement the strategy. Activities can be modified over time to address the strategy.
- **Outputs:** quantifiable deliverables, services, or events that reach target constituencies that are often identified as milestones or benchmarks. More is not necessarily better – volume is not the same as value.
- **Outcomes:** Measurable results or changes a program/organization would like to see take place over time that stems directly from what the strategies are designed to do or accomplish. Outcomes can be in the short, medium and/or long term.
- **Impact:** Long-term achievements of the organization's purpose. Impact is usually reflected in the organization's vision statement and typically cannot be achieved only by the actions of the organization alone. The organization contributes, along with others, to the ultimate impact.

Change, or the path from inputs to outcomes, is not linear. It is messy and complex. Theory of Change illustrates this complexity through cyclical processes and feedback loops. It is important for nonprofits to operate from a Theory of Change because it demonstrates the organization's reasoning and approach to its work, brings discipline and alignment to practice, and ensures logical coherence to an organization's

work and expected results. It is also the means for communicating impact of the work and creating support for it.

A logic model is the program-level pathway within the Theory of Change that connects program activities to program goals. There is usually limited flexibility and little room for the emergence of unexpected outcomes in a logic model since only the components directly connected to activities are depicted. It is linear and neat. The relationship between Theory of Change and logic models is illustrated in Graphic 2.



What are we Measuring?

Characteristics of healthy organizations emerge with some consistency from a review of the nonprofit and organizational literature. Many of the characteristics that predict impact for nonprofits – enabling factors - overlap from source to source. The enabling factors for impact, derived from the literature and from SCCADVASA’s internal documents, are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. The Primary Factors that Drive High Impact for Nonprofits		
<p>SCCADVASA Strategic Intentions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership Model <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * awareness * engagement * collective voice * revenue generation • Preventing DV and SA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * collaboration * advocacy & education * grant development * relationship building • Role Clarity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * internal * external 	<p>SCCADVASA Annual Report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy • Education & Collaboration • Systems Advocacy & Prevention • Trainings & Special Events 	<p>Accountable Communities for Health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaged Stakeholders • Data • Support • Collaborative Capacity • A Case for Change • Identified Leverage Points • Theory of Change
<p>Robert Wood Johnson Foundation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose • Data • Financing • Governance 	<p>Collaboration models</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared Purpose • Shared Data & Measurement • Sustainable Financing & Accountability • Structured Governance • Leadership and Workforce 	<p>From “Overhead Myth”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethical Practice • Performance Data • Managed Results • Understand Actual Costs • Educate Funders
<p>Universalialia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevance • Effectiveness • Efficiency • Financial Viability 	<p>BBB Wise Giving Alliance, GuideStar, and Charity Navigator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparency • Governance • Leadership • Results 	<p>Wellville</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear mission • Long Term Systems & Policy focus • Collaboration • Data / Stories

Enabling factors evaluated for SCCADVASA within the Bento Box Framework are taken from these and directly predict positive outcomes and impact of SCCADVASA’s work.

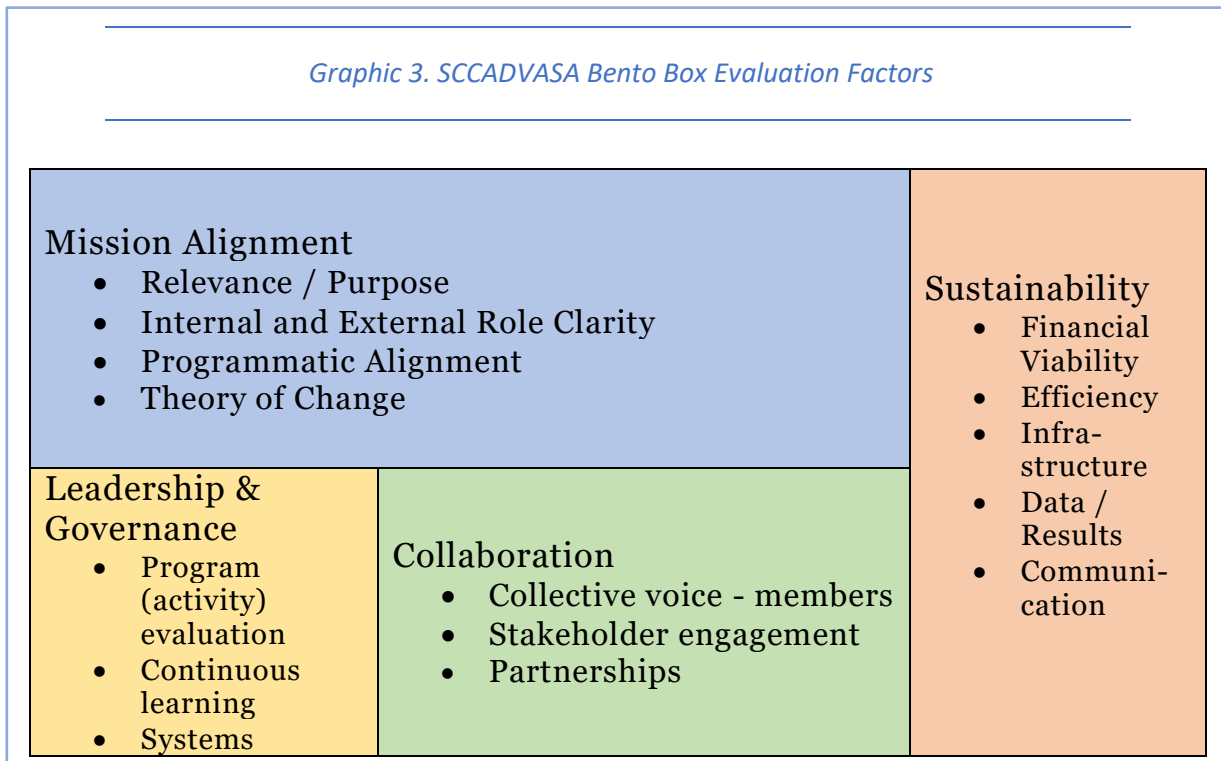
The Bento Box Evaluation Framework

The rationale for the Bento Box Evaluation Framework to assess SCCADVASA’s work is that:

1. It examines the enabling factors that predict high impact of SCCADVASA’s work in segments or “portions” balanced by importance (See Graphic 3).
2. It focuses on the things that have the greatest impact on the way the organization functions.
3. It is simple and easy to use annually or as conditions change.
4. It is deeply rooted in nonprofit best practices.
5. Because it is a self-assessment, it encourages ownership of the resulting insights and commitment to operational or programmatic shifts that might come out of those insights.

This framework is NOT a program evaluation of the interventions in SCCADVASA’s portfolio, nor is it an evaluation of the Executive Director, the staff, or the board (those are separate human resources- and governance-related activities). Those should already be occurring and providing feedback for continuous improvement.

The Bento Box Evaluation Framework will clarify SCCADVASA’s purpose, strengthen accountability, appropriately balance interests of multiple stakeholders, adjust programming, and inform new strategic planning cycles.



Since internal priorities will shift from year to year in concert with changing internal and external enabling factors, and some questions will become more important than others, there is no scoring system embedded in this rubric. This is a qualitative examination of the factors associated with impact.

Evaluation Protocol

The following **Evaluation Rubric** is based on a green-yellow-red system where green are positive assessments, yellow are partially positive or unknown, and red are negative assessments. There are 33 best practice questions, taken from the nonprofit impact literature, that assess SCCADVASA’s position relative to predictors of organizational impact, segmented by the Bento Box Evaluation Factors.

The Executive Director and the Board of Directors should complete the Evaluation Rubric annually.

- Board responses should be tallied by question (e.g. question 1 may have 5 green responses, 3 yellow responses, and 1 red response).
- Board responses may be compared to Executive Director responses with the understanding that answers are at least partly subjective.
- Results should be used as a springboard for discussion that may result in realignment of resources, new strategies or activities, celebration of progress and organizational health, etc.

SCCADVASA Bento Box Evaluation Rubric		Yes	Partly/ Maybe	No
MISSION ALIGNMENT				
1	The activities of SCCADVASA are aligned with its vision			
2	The organization’s portfolio of activities advances its mission			
3	Organization activities are guided by a Theory of Change or a formal strategy			
4	Activities are targeted in multiple ways and / or to multiple audiences			
5	Programs / interventions are evidence-based or best-practice in the field			
6	Structures are in place that are deliberate in elevating survivor voice.			
COLLABORATION				
7	SCCADVASA has a strong membership model			
8	The role of the organization is clearly understood among <u>affiliate</u> partners and constituents			

9	The role of the organization is clearly understood among <u>member partners</u>			
10	Member organizations are aligned behind a shared vision and purpose for action			
11	Member organizations are collaborating to address identified needs together			
12	Other stakeholders are engaged in the work of SCCADVASA			
13	Shared data is being used to understand progress and / or to assess performance			
14	The work of affiliates, members, and stakeholders aligns			
SUSTAINABILITY				
15	The work of SCCADVASA is sustainable			
16	Program funding is multi-year			
17	Robust infrastructure (e.g. sturdy information technology systems, financial systems, skills training, fundraising processes, and other essential overhead) exists			
18	Community-level outcomes are monitored			
19	Resources (human, financial and other) are deployed and / or leveraged in a way that is aligned with the vision and identified priorities			
20	Multiple stakeholders fund the work			
21	A mechanism for braided/blended funding is established or planned			
22	The organization invests in continuous learning and staff development			
23	Both stories and data are used to describe outputs / outcomes			
24	SCCADVASA follows a robust communications plan (outcomes are communicated widely and in timely fashion)			
25	Activities are regularly adjusted, started, and /or ended based on new information or opportunities			
LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE				
26	The role of the organization is clearly understood among <u>staff</u>			
27	The role of the organization is clearly understood by board members			
28	Organizational goals and the activities that support them are clear and formalized			
29	Management systems are clear			
30	Governance processes are clear			
31	Mechanisms are in place to ensure communication and feedback from partners and stakeholders			
32	Board members contribute personal resources to SCCADVASA			
33	SCCADVASA has a long-term focus			

Baseline Evaluation

The following is a baseline evaluation using the Bento Box Evaluation Rubric and is completed based on the key informant interviews of member and affiliate organizations and interaction with SCCADVASA’s board and Executive Director. It may or may not align with board or staff perceptions which, in itself, is instructive. **Note that responses are based on feedback from external stakeholders.**

SCCADVASA Bento Box Evaluation Rubric		Yes	Partly/ Maybe	No
MISSION ALIGNMENT				
1	The activities of SCCADVASA are aligned with its vision	√		
2	The organization’s portfolio of activities advances its mission	√		
3	Organization activities are guided by a Theory of Change or a formal strategy			√
4	Activities are targeted in multiple ways and / or to multiple audiences	√		
5	Programs / interventions are evidence-based or best-practice in the field		√	
6	Structures are in place that are deliberate in elevating survivor voice.		√	
COLLABORATION				
7	SCCADVASA has a strong membership model		√	
8	The role of the organization is clearly understood among <u>affiliate</u> partners and constituents	√		
9	The role of the organization is clearly understood among <u>member</u> partners		√	
10	Member organizations are aligned behind a shared vision and purpose for action		√	
11	Member organizations are collaborating to address identified needs together		√	
12	Other stakeholders are engaged in the work of SCCADVASA		√	
13	Shared data is being used to understand progress and / or to assess performance			√
14	The work of affiliates, members, and stakeholders aligns		√	
SUSTAINABILITY				
15	The work of SCCADVASA is sustainable		√	
16	Program funding is multi-year		√	
17	Robust infrastructure (e.g. sturdy information technology systems, financial systems, skills training, fundraising processes, and other essential overhead) exists	√		
18	Community-level outcomes are monitored	√		

19	Resources (human, financial and other) are deployed and / or leveraged in a way that is aligned with the vision and identified priorities	√		
20	Multiple stakeholders fund the work	√		
21	A mechanism for braided/blended funding is established or planned		√	
22	The organization invests in continuous learning and staff development	√		
23	Both stories and data are used to describe outputs / outcomes		√	
24	SCCADVASA follows a robust communications plan (outcomes are communicated widely and in timely fashion)	√		
25	Activities are regularly adjusted, started, and /or ended based on new information or opportunities	√		
LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE				
26	The role of the organization is clearly understood among <u>staff</u>		√	
27	The role of the organization is clearly understood by board members		√	
28	Organizational goals and the activities that support them are clear and formalized		√	
29	Management systems are clear	√		
30	Governance processes are clear	√		
31	Mechanisms are in place to ensure communication and feedback from partners and stakeholders		√	
32	Board members contribute personal resources to SCCADVASA	√		
33	SCCADVASA has a long-term focus		√	

Recommendations

- Use the aggregated responses from key informants, Executive Director, and Board of Directors to examine SCCADVASA’s status relative to the factors that predict organizational impact and to make change.
- Construct a Theory of Change for SCCADVASA and use it to organize the work of the organization and to communicate outcomes.
- Use the Bento Box Framework to make adjustments in current strategies, and activities to better align them with expected outcomes.
- Use the Evaluation Rubric annually to inform SCCADVASA’s work.

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