FUNDRAISING SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

Operational guidelines

December 2024

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Disclaimer

The Fundraising Self-Assessment Tool has been developed by the Freedom Fund exclusively to assist frontline organisations in enhancing their fundraising operations and thinking. This exercise is intended solely to strengthen organisations and is not linked in any way to Freedom Fund's grant relationships with its partners. The results of the self-assessment will remain accessible only to the organisation using the tool. The outcomes of this exercise will have no impact on existing or future funding relationships between the Freedom Fund and its partners.

Background

Over the past decade, through extensive collaboration and participatory discussions with its implementing partners, the Freedom Fund identified fundraising as an area for growth for many frontline organisations. For many organisations, fundraising is responsive and opportunistic, and the lack of core funding inhibits them from developing effective, tailored fundraising strategies. In response, the Freedom Fund partnered with a consultant to develop a tool that enables an organisation to reflect on their current fundraising capacities and practices and understand what they could explore as next steps to strengthen their organization. Nine implementing partners of the Freedom Fund, operating across three hotspots in Ethiopia, Nepal and Indonesia, provided input and insights for the Fundraising Self-Assessment Tool.

Purpose

The Fundraising Self-Assessment Tool aims to empower organisations to assess their current fundraising status and guide them in crafting a strategy to enhance their fundraising efforts. It helps civil society organisations to evaluate their readiness for various fundraising approaches and provides a comprehensive status report, that can then be used to guide their fundraising efforts.

The tool is available in five languages—English, Hindi, Nepali, Amharic and Portuguese.

Timeline and frequency

This self-assessment exercise can be conducted at any time of the year, based on the organisation's specific needs. There is no fixed timeframe for using this tool, allowing organisations the flexibility to align the assessment with their schedules and priorities.

The tool generates a detailed status report on the organisation's fundraising capacity, which serves as a foundation for developing a tailored fundraising strategy. This strategy can span a timeframe of two to five years, depending on the organisation's requirements and operational context.

Using the tool

The implementation session for the Fundraising Self-Assessment Tool typically requires around four to five hours, depending on the size and nature of the organisation. The process includes conducting the assessment, reviewing the report, and analysing the results. The session can be facilitated by an external consultant or by a staff member in the organisation. For Freedom Fund partners, an advisor from the Freedom Fund can support this process.

Organisations are encouraged to seek support from technical experts or consultants, as needed, to craft a tailored and effective fundraising strategy based on the assessment outcomes.

The Fundraising Self-Assessment Tool process includes three stages:

1. Preparing for the fundraising self-assessment process
2. Facilitating the fundraising self-assessment session
3. Interpreting and analysing the assessment report

Preparing for the fundraising self-assessment process

To conduct the self-assessment effectively, the group engaged in it should include director/secretary/leader of the organisation, program staff, finance/operations personnel, and key members of the fundraising team. If necessary, board members can also be invited to participate in the process, particularly for review and analysis. One person should be the designated anchor for this process – it could be a member of the internal team or a consultant. One person needs to be the designated note-taker, documenting key decisions and discussions.

Before the session, the anchor will need to communicate the purpose and expectations of the process with the relevant group. Sharing the tool in advance with the group is encouraged so they can familiarise themselves with the factors and questions it contains. Additionally, the anchor will need to ensure that critical organisational documents and information is available to the group or may need to create space in the process for the group to see and review these documents. Examples of such critical information include the organisation's annual budget, cash flow status, and balance sheets from the past three years.

The tool is divided into the following factors and functions:

S.N.	People	Practice	Process
1	Staffing	Revenue	Scoping
2	Skill	Cash-flow	Policies and guidelines
3	Experiences	Diversity	Culture and values
4	Leadership involvement	Goals	Fund development strategy

S.N.	People	Practice	Process
5		Visibility	Fundraising methods
6		Market intelligence	
7		Technology	

- **People:** This usually refers to the board, staff and volunteers of an organisation. They generate ideas, solve problems, make decisions, and generate learning in the organisation.
- **Practice:** The usual or expected way of doing something in a particular organisation or situation. It is like a habit or a custom.
- **Process:** A series of interdependent tasks/actions that you do or take to attain a particular purpose.

Facilitating the fundraising self-assessment session

Introduction to the tool: Overview with participants – 15 to 20 minutes

This initial step sets the tone for the self-assessment session and ensures that all participants have a clear understanding of the tool and its purpose. During this stage, the facilitator should explain:

- Purpose of the tool:
  - Highlight how the tool is designed to help the organisation evaluate its current fundraising capabilities and identify areas for improvement.
  - Emphasise that the tool is a self-reflective exercise intended to empower the organisation to develop a tailored fundraising strategy.
  - Reassure participants that the results are confidential and solely for the organisation's internal use.
- Structure:
  - Briefly explain the key components of the tool, such as the 16 elements it evaluates and the format of the multiple-choice questions.
  - Clarify how responses will be used to generate a status report and guide strategy development.
- Session Process:
  - Provide an overview of the session's agenda, including the time needed for each segment—conducting the assessment, reviewing results, and analysing findings.

  - Stress the importance of active participation and honest responses to ensure meaningful outcomes.
- Expectations:
  - Describe what the organisation hopes to achieve through this process, such as actionable insights and a roadmap for strengthening fundraising efforts.
  - Encourage participants to ask questions and raise concerns to foster a collaborative and open environment.

This overview ensures that all participants are aligned and prepared for the session, creating a strong foundation for productive discussions and accurate assessments.

Conducting the Assessment: Completing the self-assessment – 90 to 120 minutes

The self-assessment session is the core activity of the tool, where participants collectively evaluate the organisation's fundraising capacity.

There is no strict formula or method for completing the self-assessment. However, teams typically approach it by carefully reading each statement and building group consensus on the understanding before answering each question. Once all questions have been answered, it is recommended that the group reviews the final submission together to ensure accuracy and consistency.

It is best that responses to the survey are guided by data in the documents that the group has reviewed, or on discussions regarding the way things are done in the organisation. When discussing elements that lack data (such as numerical evidence, reliable anecdotes, or specific benchmarks), it is advisable to understand why this is so. For example, determining the current staffing situation may be relatively straightforward, as participants are familiar with the individuals working in fundraising. However, more strategic elements, such as organisational culture, fund development strategies, cash-flow management, and fundraising method choices, may require more in-depth discussion and deliberation.

In total, the self-assessment process should be collaborative. A group should expect to spend approximately 120 minutes to 150 minutes answering all 64 multiple-choice questions, ensuring that each question is carefully considered and discussed. This focused effort will help generate accurate insights and a comprehensive understanding of the organisation's fundraising landscape.

Some guidance is provided below to follow for the organisation:

- The facilitator leads the process, explaining each section of the tool, guiding discussions, and ensuring all participants contribute. They should encourage open and honest responses while maintaining a neutral stance to avoid influencing opinions.
- The self-assessment tool is structured around 16 elements, each with four multiple-choice questions representing various states of fundraising functions. Participants review each question and select the option that best describes the organisation's current state.
- For each question, participants should engage in a group discussion to ensure a shared understanding of the organisation's current practices. The notetaker should document key

points from these discussions, including any disagreements or insights that arise during the process.

- The group works together to reach a consensus on the most accurate response for each question. If a consensus cannot be reached, the facilitator may encourage further discussion or ask participants to prioritise the response that reflects the majority view.

- Allocate sufficient time to thoroughly discuss each element without rushing but stay mindful of the session schedule. The facilitator should ensure that the group stays focused and avoids unnecessary digressions.

- Responses should be carefully recorded in the tool, as they will form the basis for the subsequent status report and analysis. Ensure that all entries are complete and accurate before proceeding to the next step.

The self-assessment process enables the organisation to take a structured and in-depth look at its fundraising practices, fostering a deeper understanding of strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement.

Interpreting and analysing the assessment report

After completing the assessment, the tool shall generate the report in the form of graphics and narrative for reflection by the participants. There are following steps to be followed by the participants during the session.

Reviewing results: Understanding the report – 60 to 90 minutes

For each of the 16 elements, the tool provides approximately 80 cues (such as bullet points, issues, or potential areas for intervention) to help guide organisation thinking. These cues are designed to prompt to consider where changes or improvements might be necessary.

If none of the provided cues resonate with the organisation, it gives the option to write own reflection points under the "Others" section. This process works best when discussions are effectively facilitated by leadership or key decision-makers within the organisation, ensuring a constructive and focused conversation.

At the conclusion of this step, it gives a clearer understanding of the most appropriate actions to take in order to improve the current state of your fundraising function. This section requires collaboration and structured group work and is expected to take approximately 60 to 90 minutes to complete thoroughly.

Analysing and reading outcomes: Interpreting findings and insights – 45 to 60 minutes

While thoroughly reviewing the current state, this section can typically be completed in 45 to 60 minutes. It will provide possible actions to consider, each aimed at initiating improvements in your fundraising operations. The organisation can select any of the actions that align with their needs. The organisation can also add its own.

The report includes a graphical representation of your organisation’s fundraising operations, which is presented in the first part of the report. This visual summary shows the overall score for all factors under assessment, along with specific scores for each area evaluated. Based on self-assessment scores, the report will assign the organisation a title, reflecting the current state of your fundraising operations.

The overall grading of fundraising operations is categorised into five levels, ranging from "Curious" to "Led." This grading provides a clear indication of where your organisation currently stands in terms of fundraising maturity and effectiveness. This is not a judgement on your organisation but an opportunity for you to think about how you want to enable it to grow stronger.

- Curious: Your fundraising operation is at an infancy stage, and you are willing to learn and grow.
- Informed: Your fundraising operation covers basic needs, and you are keen to improve.
- Guided: Your fundraising operation is moderately developed, and you are ready to improve efforts.
- Driven: Your fundraising operation is very well organised and well performing.
- Led: Your fundraising operation is highly advanced and is setting benchmarks for others to follow.

In the top-right corner of the graphical report, you will find a link to your self-assessment, allowing you to easily share a copy of the report with others. The descriptive section of the report (the second part) is the most critical section. How you utilise this section, and the depth of your analysis will be key to making the most out of this self-assessment tool.

This part provides a detailed written description of the choices and decisions made during the self-assessment process. For each choice, the report includes a color-coded "traffic light" indicator (red, yellow, green) to show the current state of each area. Following the logic of a traffic light:

- Red (25%): Indicates a critical issue, signalling that it is risky to proceed without addressing it.
- Orange (50%): Indicates area is underdeveloped, and improvement is required.
- Yellow (75%): Advises caution, meaning you should monitor this area closely while continuing forward.
- Green (100%): Indicates a healthy state, where you can confidently move forward.

By carefully analysing these color-coded indicators, you can pinpoint the most urgent areas for attention and prioritise your fundraising improvements accordingly.

If the self-assessment selections are made thoughtfully and accurately reflect the current state of your fundraising operations, the graphical section of the report can serve as a highly effective diagnostic tool. This visual overview helps you quickly identify areas where your organisation is performing well, as well as areas that require improvement—whether immediately or over the long term.

Guidance for way forward and feedback process

Once the self-assessment process is completed and the relevant discussions have taken place, the organisation should prepare a report based on the findings and insights gathered during the assessment. This report should include an analysis of the current state of the organisation's fundraising operations, as well as key reflections and proposed actions for improvement.

The organisation may choose to send this report to the Freedom Fund hotspot team and the Grassroots Capacity Enhancement Team for review and feedback. These teams will carefully evaluate the report and provide their input, which will be shared back with the organisation. The organisation should review and incorporate any comments or suggestions before finalising the document.

Once finalised, this report will serve as the foundational document for developing the organisation's fundraising strategy. The organisation may also incorporate this document into the Organisational Capacity Analysis Tool if they are a Freedom Fund grantee.

For organisations that are not part of the Freedom Fund partnership, they are encouraged to share the results of the assessment with their respective donors as a way of seeking funding support to strengthen their capacities, or to use the findings as a basis for developing their own fundraising strategy.