

Research Questions – State of Capacity Building 2026

RQ1. How is capacity building currently understood, framed, and valued across the education and youth development field, and where does it remain invisible?

- How do nonprofits and funders define capacity building in practice?
- Which forms of capacity building work are essential to organizational effectiveness but are rarely named, prioritized, or funded as capacity building?
- Where do nonprofit and funder understandings of “what counts as capacity” diverge in ways that shape what gets funded or not?

RQ2. What capacity-building needs are most urgent for education and youth development nonprofits today, and which needs are becoming more acute?

- Which capacity domains represent the greatest constraints?
- How do needs vary by organizational size, stage, geography, and leadership demographics?
- Which challenges are persistent vs. newly intensified (e.g., staffing, tech, AI) in the context of macro trends?
- Which capacity-building needs remain chronic and ongoing for education and youth development nonprofits, and which are emerging as more pressing concerns?

RQ3. How is capacity building currently funded and structured in practice and how consistent is that support?

- How do funders resource capacity building (explicit vs. implicit)?
- How do duration, flexibility, and funding mechanisms shape what nonprofits can address?

RQ4. Where do gaps and mismatches exist between nonprofit needs, funder investments, and available support?

- Which capacity areas show the largest demand - investment gaps?
- Where does the supply of providers fall short in availability, quality, or fit?

RQ5. How do access to and benefits of capacity building vary across organizations and where are inequities structural rather than situational?

- How do access and outcomes differ by organizational size, geography, and leadership demographics?
- Where do inequities persist in culturally grounded support and multiyear funding?

RQ6. What do these findings imply for how the field should invest in, deliver, and track capacity building going forward?

- What practices should funders normalize, change, or stop?
- Which indicators should be tracked annually to monitor progress over time?