

Strategic Positioning Part 1: Identifying Your competitive Advantage

Thursday, January 16, 2014

Elena F.: I think we're going to go ahead with the group that we have. It's nice in some ways to have a small group because it allows us to chat more with each other. I think we'll try to really take advantage of those opportunities. Please just take a deep breath right now and get ready to participate, because that's the real great thing about having a small group—and we've tried to make this a participatory conversation in any case.

As I mentioned, this is the first of a series of three webinars, or, experiences, that we have. Today, we're talking about Competitive Advantage, and then next week, on Tuesday, we'll be talking about tools for strategic decision making, so walking through what some various tools are that you can use in different steps of a strategic decision-making process.

We're looking forward to doing that with you all at 1 o'clock Eastern on Tuesday, and then on the 28th we have an opportunity for a chat. Just more of an informal conversation with myself and with Lester, your co—presenter, to talk through both the concepts and any questions or observations that you have about what the webinars cover, and then also to talk through your experience using the tools as well. And again, any questions around those.

Please be sure you've got that marked off on your calendar. I think it'll be a valuable opportunity for us all to learn from each other and for you to ask questions or make observations.

Just a little bit about who we are. I know some of you that have registered for the call, we've worked with in the past and may have participated in [00:02:00] previous webinars, so we're glad to have you back. I, as you might have guessed, am the person on the left of your screen. I'm Elena Thomas Faulkner and I'm a senior consultant here at JSI. I'll talk a little bit more about JSI in a minute. But just to give you a little bit of background on myself ...

I've been working in HIV prevention-related work for about 15 years, and with the team here at JSI for 9 years. I also do a fair bit of work with a wide variety of community-based organizations, so both HIV focused and also, in particular, with community help centers. In the course of the work that we've done with the [CIBA 00:02:43] here at JSI we came across the work of La Piana consulting and Lester Olmstead-Rose, and so we're really excited to have Lester join us on several webinars in the past, and then again, this time.

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Lester, do you want to just share a little bit about your background?

Lester O.R.: Yes. Hi, everybody, and thank you, Elena. It's great to be on this call ... on this webinar to be able to talk with you all. Just a little of my background, and like Elena, I'll talk about our firm in a little bit further, in a moment, but my background is that I do come out of running non-profits. I was staff and an executive director at non-profits in San Francisco working in the LGBT community.

When I did that, it was not working specifically on HIV issues, but, of course, partnering with a lot of HIV organizations. I have done various things; I've worked politically, which actually informs non-profit work a lot. Always happy to chat about how politics affects non-profit. Currently, I am, as you see on the screen, I am a partner with La Piana consulting. I have been with the firm consulting for ... almost 9 years now [00:04:00], and my practice really covers all fields.

I'm not specific to health care and HIV work, I've worked with organizations of all shapes, sizes, and content. So thank you for participating, and hopefully this will be a fun and interesting webinar for you.

Elena F.: Thanks, Lester. Just a couple of words about JSI. Many of you who are participating received a communication from us about this opportunity through our capacity building assistance program, which is funded by the CDC and through which JSI works with community-based organizations on the three areas that are noted on the slide:

- Program monitoring and evaluation.
- Organizational infrastructure.
- And also around specific behavioral interventions.

JSI, more broadly, has been working in HIV prevention and care, really, since the beginning of the epidemic. So for us, what's kind of nice about being able to work on this capacity building assistance project with the CDC is that it allows us to kind of bring together those worlds of care and prevention in the broader understanding of both public health, which we address more broadly as a community, and HIV prevention.

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I think that's all I'll say about JSI. We do have the website here at the bottom of this slide and then at the end of the presentation as well. I'll pass it back to Lester to have him talk a little bit about La Piana.

Lester O.R.:

Sure. This introductory slide for La Piana Consulting is different than one I've ever used before. We wanted this because it's relevant to this webinar. The firm works only with non-profit organizations, we have a national reach. We do a fair amount of independent research [00:06:00] and development in terms of organizational effectiveness and non-profit effectiveness. We were actually founded around the project-developing mergers. how do you approach mergers as a non-profit? That was the research and various publications that launched the firm.

What you see here is actually a trajectory of three such research and product development efforts in the firm that are directly relevant to what this conversation is about and what these three webinars are about. David La Piana wrote the book "Play to Win" because he had observed that there is this thing about competition in the non-profit field.

It has often been kind of a third rail. You're not supposed to talk about it. It's kind of dangerous to talk about it because we're all non-profits and we're all trying to do good work in the world. So he wrote a book called "Play to Win" which really tries to dig into how competition actually does play out in the non-profit field, and I do want to—we'll talk more about this later—but it doesn't mean that we don't also partner, and work well, and cooperate with each other; and we'll talk about.

It started with a little bit of an exploration of how competition plays out. We then turned to look at how strategic planning is done in the non-profit field, because we, as well as others, have been very dissatisfied with how it's played out. And as we looked at strategic planning, we realized that competition and the concepts of competition and competitive advantage were really central to good strategy development, and so we ended up developing a process around ... I don't like to call it strategic planning, I always call it strategy development, developing a process around strategy development. [00:08:00].

That includes a lot of competitive thinking, or, ideas about competition. That ultimately led, then, to the realization that once you have good strategy, then you need to figure out how to put it into place or how to launch new endeavors or things, and so that translated then pretty immediately into how you do business planning for non-profit.

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Those issues are things we all engage in with our non-profit clients and work that I've done very directly with scores of non-profit, and that really informs, certainly, my thinking around this webinar. So, thanks, Elena.

Elena F.: Great. Thanks, Lester. As I mentioned before, we want to hear from you throughout the webinar, and so we're going to use some different interactive functions that I want to make sure everyone's familiar with to do that. Those should be available to you at the top of your screen. There should be a drop-down box, and there's one that says "chat." If you click on that chat box, you'll be able to see everyone who's participating. And at the bottom of that box, there's a little button that says, "Raise Hand."

If everyone who finds that could click on it to raise their hand ... Great. I see Cathleen and Candia, not sure I'm saying your name right, raising your hand ... Alexia ... [No one 00:09:35] else. If you're having trouble finding it, please send a chat to the host, who's Morgan, and she's here providing technical assistance. That's the other thing to know, that if you have any challenges around technical issues, send a chat and you should be able to see that.

Oh, I may have given you guys bad information. Sorry. It's the participant box that [00:10:00] has the hand that you can click. In the chat box, you can choose to whom you send a chat. You can send it to the whole group or just to Morgan as the host. If you have a technical issue, send it to Morgan. There'll be times when we ask you to communicate with us.

Great. I see more hands up now. If you ever would like to jump in, and we're not giving an opportunity, please raise your hand and then we know that you'd like to do that and we'll try to pay attention to that.

Morgan Anderson: You also need to un-raise your own hand, since your question's been answered.

Elena F.: Great. If your question's answered, you can un-raise your own hand. You should have a "Lower Hand" button in that participant box. Great. I see everyone has lowered their hands.

Then the other functionality that we're going to be using a lot is pulling. We'll walk through a pull in just a minute.

One note about open phone lines, I think because we have a relatively small group, as we're doing some discussion we will open the phone

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lines, so we just ask that you be aware of any background noise that you have at that time and that you mute yourself if you have that going on.

We'll just see how that goes. Sometimes even with a small group, there's a lot of background noise, and in that case, we communicate through the chat function. But for now we will hope that we can open them all the way.

Let's go ahead and get started. I'm going to pass all over here to ... Morgan. I'm going to send control to Morgan and we're going to go ahead and start our next chat.

You'll have to ... advance the slide. Sorry, Morgan.

So what we wanted to find out about you all, just to start with, is where you are, where you're located [00:12:00], and then also how large your organization's annual budget is. You should have a poll that has popped up on your screen where you can select one of the responses. We're going to ... I think we, as staff, could as well. So just choose your response to both of those questions, and once you've answered them both, go ahead and hit submit.

We've got a couple minutes for you to do that, but Morgan will also pay attention ... We have most of our responses in. Yeah, it looks like we have a couple more folks. Take your time to answer. If you're not sure exactly what your organizational budget is, a guess will do. This is really just ... that question is really for us to gauge more or less what the size of your operations are.

Okay, we're going to go ahead and close the poll. Morgan will be able to share with us what the responses are. You should be able to see in your chart. It looks like we have three folks in the northeast, one in the mid-west, one in the Rocky Mountain west, and one in the west coast—and that might be Lester and myself, I'm not sure.

Then, in terms of the size of the organization, it looks like we have quite a spread. Just a little bit of varied representation. No one under \$1 million annual budget, so no real small organizations, but quite a range between the one million and the over 10 million. So, thanks. That's really helpful to us in getting a sense of how large your organizations [00:14:00] are and the perspective that you're coming from.

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Moving on then, just real quickly to talk about what we're hoping to cover today, we have three main learning objectives. One is to build some understanding around how non-profit organizations do compete. Like Lester mentioned, we tend to sort of ... draw a sharp breath when we hear about non-profits competing, but we really do so understanding why identifying one's competitive advantage is important within that context.

Then we'll talk more specifically about how to assess your own organization's competitive advantage and we'll share some processes and a tool that will help with that process. Okay, we're going to run another poll right now. This one is just responding to that word "competitive". When you think about the word competitive, which of these other possible synonyms jumps most to mind for you?

And you should have the poll ... yup ... jumping up. Go ahead and respond. Does the word competitive mean to you being proficient, being cutthroat, being viable, being aggressive, being for-profit, or does it have some other meaning? (pause) Okay, so we're just wrapping up. Waiting for a couple more responses. I know that's one that takes some thought.

Here's our responses. Good ... Again, a kind of a [00:16:00] range of responses. Proficiency ... about ... It looks like we've got about a third, [&] a third, [&] a third ... viability and then aggressiveness. That's, I think, a good starting point in terms of talking about our perceptions around what competitive advantage is and what it isn't. We'll get a move on, and Lester's going to start talking about that a little bit with us.

Lester O.R.:

Great. Thank you. It's always good to start with a little bit of a definition. In this case, competitive advantage, the definition ... I like to think of it, that it's a strength that makes you different and better than others in your field. It's a strength, also, that can be leveraged to advance your mission. A few elements to that, it's a strength, and when we work with organizations—and we'll talk about this more—you always start with understanding what your strengths are, but the it really is that differentiating piece.

Not only does it distinguish you from other people doing similar work, but really it allows you to be more effective in some way than others. So it's a real value proposition, and then that is all ... has to be built around advancing your mission. That's why we are non-profits, and if your mission is to do good in the world and to change things for the better, then you want to apply this in that way.

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There are a couple types of competitive advantages, and this comes straight out of for-profit business theory, but it really does apply. You can either have an asset advantage or a process advantage. An asset advantage, most non-profits, or, fewer non-profits, I should say, have this one. It could be that you have capital that you can work with [00:18:00], or a major endowment, or maybe you have a building, or your location might be really good, something that is kind of ... more of ... something you own.

Or you could have a process advantage. A process advantage might be, in the non-profit context, it could be ... for many, it's that you have a type of program or a way of running a program that is unique to you. It could be that you offer low-cost services that make you a preferred provider of service. It could be your customer service, or your reputation, or relationship with a community. Those are great examples of process advantages in the non-profit field.

Actually, we can go on to the next slide, and I'm not sure ...

Elena F.: You can advance that. I've given you presenter rights, Lester.

Lester O.R.: Yeah ... but no, I'm ... I think you should take it back and move the slide for me, because I'm not- ... There we go. I don't know if you did that or I did that. Okay, thanks. Sorry, everybody. A little bump there.

As we've alluded to, we know that competition can be a little bit of a ... challenging question for people sometimes. And it sounds like this group, it's not as difficult for you, but we just really think it's a useful frame. Because for these two points, one of them really helps you focus and helps you understand how to focus your work and what you do. And with your staff, it helps you understand what skills you need to build. It's a way of thinking about yourself as an organization that can make you really effective and pay attention to the right things. [00:20:00].

That's why, as a concept, it's useful. It's also really useful, because one of the most difficult things non-profits face is making decisions. What opportunity do we pursue? How do we respond to a challenge? So the concept of competition and competitive advantage is really we use it all the time as guidance to organizations to help you sort through your decision making. You can go on to the next slide. I think you can go on to the next slide. Or maybe I can. There we go.

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Another thing that's just useful, and I would see these more as kind of add-on benefits. One is that, really, this is something that funders care about. And when you think back to the definition and the part of it that is about differentiating you, I can't tell you through my many years of working in non-profits how often I've heard funders talk about how they see so many organizations that do very similar things and they wonder why there are so many.

Where you can articulate to your funders or to your community, how you do something differently, and are more effective in achieving your mission because of that, the better you can do that; then the more likely you're going to garner the resources you want in order to carry out your mission. Then finally, knowing where you are really strong, where you are different, makes you a better partner.

Back to some of those negative connotations with competition, which you all don't really share so much, but just keeping those in mind, knowing your competitive advantage and thinking about other in the field as competitors, as an analysis, that doesn't mean you want to put them out of business or you're trying to undermine them or anything, it's not about that at all. In fact, it allows you [00:22:00] to walk into a room and know what you bring to the table, and that allows you to know what you're looking for in a partner or where you're not as strong and how you can work together. Let's go to the next slide.

We think of competition in three categories, and most of this comes, again, from for-profit business thinking, but not all. There's direct competition, substitutable and resource competition—and resource is the one that, really, at La Piana, we created that, because we needed it in thinking about non-profits, and it is somewhat different than in for-profits.

Direct competition, of course, is exactly what it sounds like. An example would be it's another HIV prevention program maybe, serving the same target population with a similar intervention program in a similar community. For example, if there are two organizations in Houston providing services to Latino men who have sex with men, it might be very similar ... Although, that's very direct.

A really important competitive framework is understanding substitutable competition. Those are organizations that do something similar but not the same, but somebody in need may substitute one organization for the other, or one provider for the other. An example might be if there were

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two organizations, say, in Miami, and they were addressing prevention services to high-risk Latinos, one might come at it with a real focus on substance abuse so that that's their primary focus. And another might be really set up to organize in the LGBT community.

So they don't do exactly the same things, but they both end up addressing HIV issues. In the HIV field, of course [00:24:00], a great example of such suitable competitors are anybody else in the health care field. They may not engage in HIV directly, but a family doctor or even a private practice therapist, anybody who becomes a resource for education and services, that might be a substitutable competitor.

Finally, resource competitors, that's about all those big things where people in the community who are loosely non-profits, or loosely in your field, you compete. You compete for board members, for great staff members, you compete for funding, for media attention, all those things that allow you to talk about and to succeed in carrying out your mission. There are a lot of other organizations that are vying for those things in your community, and that's the resource competition. Next slide, thank you.

When you, just as a ... we wanted to ... We included this slide as a framework for things you want to think about when you are thinking about competition and your competitive advantage. We're going to go into more detail in a little bit about how you can walk through a process to identify your own, but we wanted to start with this idea that you really, when trying to understand your own competitive advantage, you really want to think about all the different aspects of your organizations.

For example, stop and think about what assets you bring. We talked about some of those, buildings and the location of your organization, reputation in either the broad community you serve or any specific sub-communities. Those are all things that are real assets for you. Actually, I'd add one here: supporters and volunteers, donors and volunteers; that could be a real asset that you may start with. [00:26:00].

Then you do want to look at your services, or your programs. What do you bring there? What are they? Where are they different than what others may bring? Where are they really very high in terms of mission effectiveness? So, your ability to connect with and engage high-risk populations or communities, your great testing services—your flawless, seamless links to broader services. Things like that where you may just really excel.

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Around revenue and funding, I think that's pretty obvious to everybody. It usually means not only that you have enough money, to put it bluntly, but also that it's stable money. You have a variety of funding sources and it might be that either you have fee for service in some areas. It may be a very strong donor base so that you have hundreds or thousands of people or foundations, maybe some mix of government funding that's not 90 percent but more like 50 percent so that you have some mix of that and that it's strong and sustainable, and you're able to adapt changes in that funding base over time.

Then we look, also ... I'm going to actually move this along, but just organizational skills is another one. We talked a little bit about that. That might fit under the operations here. So, customer service, workflow, how you are a learning organization ... I've worked with organizations where sometimes their competitive advantage is their ability to be flexible and respond to changes ahead of other organizations. That's a good example of that. Let's go on to the next slide.

Here we are at ... we wanted ... I think Elena will jump in, but I think we wanted to actually open the lines for you here [00:28:00] and ask you a question. You can always chat as well in addition to talking, but we really wanted to just pause and ask you what you think the strengths of CBO's are ... or, what strengths CBO's need, what strengths non-profits need that are really critical to HIV prevention in the emerging environment. We kind of want to open up that conversation. When you think of particular strengths that would really set an organization apart, make it super-effective, in the HIV field, what do you think people need at this point? Any thoughts? Give you a second ...

Elena F.: Can you guys ... Can you ... raising your hand, so go ahead. (pause)

Lester O.R.: I think Candi is unmuted?

Elena F.: Everyone is unmuted, so you should be able to talk. Cathleen and Candi, I saw you both, and just go ahead and jump in, you don't necessarily have to raise your hand, but I'm glad you have something to say. Go ahead.

Candia Clarke: Okay, this is Candia, I just wanted to say that, in this HIV environment, I think we need strong leadership to be able to align our prevention outcomes with the national HIV strategy, and really be able to [add 00:29:26] leadership and management that can focus on these outcomes.

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Elena F.: Yeah, there is definitely on the national level, a lot of accountability being driven by that national HIV/AIDS strategy. That's a great observation.

Lester O.R.: Yeah. And I really like how you emphasize the strong leadership, because one type of leadership is being able to manage what you're already doing—and that's really important—but another type of leadership is that when something changes, like the national agenda [00:30:00], or what it's looking for, changes, that you're able to lead your local organization to align. That's a great example.

Cathleen Maine: This is Cathleen speaking. I wanted to throw in that in our agency's experience, the one thing that's helping us as a strength is being incredibly nimble and adaptable, because the influences are coming from so many different sectors right now in terms of program design and funding formularies, etcetera. So having a nimble agency, whether it means you're small and able to turn on a dime, or whether you're bigger and just very well run and able to respond the same way, we found that to be a really important strength for us.

Lester O.R.: Great example, and I love how you think about it as both small or large. And where there are multiple HIV organizations in a community, thinking about how there are advantages to being one or the other and how you can leverage that to be effective with your mission, is really important. And nimbleness. That comes out in nimbleness.

It tends to be hard, the bigger the organization, the harder it tends to be nimble. That's a great example.

Karen Campbell: This is Karen. I think it's really important to have a really good partnership with your consumers, no matter who your consumers may be, and they may be ever-changing, and having them as part of your development team.

Lester O.R.: Yeah. One thing about the partnership with consumers, I'll just mention, I agree with you, it's so critical. It's one that can often be hard to leverage into resources. It is so important. You kind of lose credibility without it, and you need it. But then [00:32:00] taking it to the next step, I know a lot of clients I work with, taking it to the next step, I'm thinking about how do you essentially mobilize or use to help your consumers, how do you use that relationship to help meet their needs better. But that's a great example.

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- Elena F.: Any other thoughts before we move on? I think we have a couple other folks on the line. Or reflections about what your colleagues have said?
- Candia Clarke: Yeah, and especially on the last comment, this is Candi again, I would also extend the partnership, the [consumers to partnership 00:32:40] with other organizations so that together we can leverage resources within the community. I know that a lot of funders are looking for collaboration and opportunities to collaborate. That is pretty attractive right now for funding opportunities as well.
- Lester O.R.: Yeah. Great example. Again, I've worked with organizations where they've realized that their true distinguishing skill-set is that they're great partners. They know how to do that. It's not always easy. That's a great example.
- Elena F.: Great. Thank you for jumping in there. I appreciate everyone sharing their thoughts and their experience. We're just going to move forward to talk about this process of identifying your competitive advantage in a little bit more detail. I just wanted to kind of give you a visual here for what that cycle looks like. The first step is kind of knowing what the field is, and I think ...
- Candi, you alluded to that, in part, in terms of the national HIV/AIDS strategy and how that's shaping the field. Others of you spoke about other [00:34:00] organizations in your community that are doing the work. That can be both the field, in terms of what is the task at hand or what are the services that are needed, and then also moves into knowing who your competitors are. They may be competitors that you end up collaborating with. But to know who those folks are and what their strengths are as well as knowing your own strength.
- Knowing the competitors means knowing who they are in those three categories that Lester spoke about earlier: the direct, the substitutable, and the other one ...
- Lester O.R.: Resource.
- Elena F.: Thank you. Resource. And then knowing specifically what it is that they do and what their strengths are, which we'll talk about in more detail. Then once you understand who your competitors are, moving on to knowing your own strengths. Those of you who shared on the phone just now I think have a pretty solid understanding of what some of your strengths are, and we have a resource that we'll share later in the

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webinar that also helps to kind of walk through what some of those detailed strengths are. So, looking again at all those different areas of business that Lester walked through just a minute ago.

Then, from your strengths, knowing what's your advantage. So what is it that really sets you apart from your competitors, you can build on then to be able to better complete the mission that you're set out to complete.

In terms of understanding what your strengths are and your competitors strengths, there are some steps that we wanted to share, just knowing that this is an ongoing process. What the field looks like, who your competitors are, your own strengths, and your own advantage may change over time. This is sort of a [00:36:00] process that needs to be happening somewhat continually but at times like this where there is big change, you may go through a more in-depth process.

Some steps with that process of identifying both your competitors and your own strengths would be to work with your internal leadership, staff board, and managers, to understand what the field looks like. From a management perspective, you may have a very different understanding of what the field is than someone who's more on the front line, or from a board member who's involved in a different way, perhaps from a different perspective. So starting with those folks to identify what the field is and who the competitors are within that field.

Then, in terms of your strengths, once you've identified what the strengths are, then being able to differentiate, which of those do you have that other competitors don't have that might be different and that are better than what other folks are able to bring to the table.

Oh, and Lester, I was supposed to turn it over to you there, so I'll let you go on and then I'll go on to the next slide.

Lester O.R.:

That's okay, that's okay. Actually, stay on this one just for a second. One of the things that feels counterintuitive to people sometimes on this first step is that when we work with folks, we usually say, "Start by thinking about others in the field." And the only conversation, I get kind of hard-nosed about this, I say only think about the strengths of other people in the field. Lots of times people want to say, "Oh, yeah, they're great at this, but ... they're not so good at this, and this, and this." And I say, "No,

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no, no, we're not having that conversation. Just stop with where they are strong."

And it's really ... it can be eye-opening when you allow yourself to admire and appreciate how other organizations are really succeeding and how come they're doing that. So that's the start, and then you move on to your own strengths. [00:38:00] As Elena said, once you identify your own strengths, then you can compare yours to others in the field. At this stage, one of the things that can be difficult is when you kind of have to discard some strengths. If that makes sense. And what I mean by that is not that you ignore them or you stop being strong in some areas, but for the purpose of the analysis of what's our competitive advantage, some strengths are really great things, but they don't necessarily set you apart, and you really do have to go back to this issue of what sets you apart.

Thanks, Elena, if you want to go on to the next slide.

Elena F.: Yeah. I just want to check, because I see that Candi has her hand up, so I want to see if she had something she-

Lester O.R.: Okay.

Elena F.: What's that? To add in or if that was from before.

Candia Clarke: No, I ... that was from before. That was still there. I'm sorry.

Elena F.: Okay. No, that's fine. I just wanted to make sure that we weren't missing something. Okay, so-

Lester O.R.: Great. So from that internal process, we suggest that folks create a hypothesis, as it were. So saying, "This is what we believe our competitive advantage is." We've looked a little bit at others in the field, we've looked at our own strengths, here is where we think there is something that differentiates us and something that is important to our mission. At the same time as you start with this internal hypothesis, it's really important to not quite trust yourself.

This just has to do with looking in the mirror; we don't see the same person when we look in the mirror that other people see when they look at us. We really urge organizations to test your hypothesis about what your competitive advantage is, and you see here on the slide some great

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ways that you can do that. Very first on the list is funders. [00:40:00]
Talking with funders about this is really a positive, useful thing to do.
Especially those funders where you've developed a little bit of a
relationship.

But they know everybody who's doing similar work. They're all submitting
proposals and program reports and talking to the funder. Funders, they
don't have a complete view, but they really do begin to develop an
understanding of the field that they work in. They can be a really useful ...
people to go to, to get response.

Where you have a relationship, again here, it's with a competitor, but of
course that also means you're collaborators, as we talked about earlier.
So people you work with in the field and cooperate with, talk with them
about this. General community leaders is good. And then you may have
internal data, certainly client feedback, funder data.

Your program staff is actually a great place to go, especially for somewhat
larger organizations. This is a really good question to engage line staff if
you phrase it well and are really thoughtful about how you approach.
They really understand where things work well and where they don't, and
it can be really insightful. So test your hypothesis. The next slide.

Then we really ... Again, today we're not going deeply, deeply into the
use of competitive advantage, but we see it as such a critical element of
what you build your organization around and what you build your
decision making around, that we really think it's important to adopt it.
And what I mean by that is that ... First of all, you may come up with a
few items that might be competitive advantages [00:42:00], and then you
want to say, "Well, which of these can we really build our organization
and our decisions around? Which ones really will help us achieve our
mission?" And really narrowing it to no more than one or two
competitive advantages, and then going through some process, I'd say
that 95 percent of the time that it should involve your board where you
formally say, "Yes. We understand this to be our competitive advantage."

It's just a step that, again, it gets missed, but that shared understanding
of your competitive advantage will really serve your organization well.
Elena?

Elena F.: Great. Thanks, Lester. Just going to take a positive as any questions at this
point, although we didn't have it programmed in. But just in case, raise
your hand if you've got something you'd like to ask or jump in on. Or

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always feel free to send a chat. So just a couple more things before we come back to you all then with some more conversation. We wanted to go in a little more into detail about knowing the field, and I think the first step with this step is to be really clear on what field you're talking about.

What are your services and what are your product? Are your services HIV prevention? Are they HIV services? Are they help services? Is it really a general community service that you provide, or substance abuse, for example, as a specific focus? You want to really tease out what it is that you're offering and the different lenses that you might offer that through. For example, I have worked with organizations that do HIV prevention as a large chunk of their work, but they do it in such a way that what they're really focused on is community empowerment and transforming the way that ... or helping people within the community just sort of transform their own relationship with the community. [00:44:00]

That's a really different way of really thinking about the service and the product that they're offering. The other thing to think about is both the geographic community and service community. You may be operating in a specific geography in a city or a set of smaller communities, and in some ways, that's the field that you want to look to. What other organizations exist in these same geographic areas that you exist in?

However, if you have several target populations or purposes, it may be that your ... the community that you serve is broader than that geographic community, so maybe you're serving a specific population. Maybe it's men who have sex with me or the LGBT community that's broader than what that geography is that you operate in, or you might be competing with folks that are outside of the same geography, or by the same token you may have a specific population within that geography that you're really excelling at working with in terms of how you target your services.

Maybe you're focusing specifically on the Latino community within that particular geography. Again, you want to be really clear when you're thinking about competitors, both what the services are that you're offering that other folks might be offering and also what the community is that you're working with, to be able to really know what the field is that you're defining.

Just in terms of thinking about high-impact prevention and the direction that HIV prevention and services is moving in, especially in terms of the national strategy, just to remember that there may be new types of

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competitors that you didn't think about before. And Lester alluded to this earlier, but there might be organizations that are now starting to do chronic disease management, especially with the Affordable Care Act [00:46:00] insurance product implementation. So maybe they're really working to help provide services to folks with all kinds of chronic disease, including those with HIV, and engaging those populations in a way that they may have not before.

Similarly, there may be medical providers who are integrating treatment as prevention into their work, and so they're starting to reach a segment of the population that maybe we didn't think about so much before when prevention wasn't thought of in terms of this broader sort of treatment as prevention strategy. Then again, I think, historically, these competitors have been out there for organizations providing HIV services.

But public health providers or other health care providers who are doing screening and testing are doing outreach and awareness campaigns also.

Anyone have thoughts they would like to add to that, Lester, or any participants?

Lester O.R.: No, that's good. But anybody else? (pause)

Elena F.: Okay. I think I'm going to skip over this next thing in terms of the competitor strengths, because I think we've spoken about it quite a bit already. But just a reminder to go through these various aspects. You may be much more familiar with one aspect of your competitors, because that's the aspect that you bump into the most. Let's say that they're ... that you see them in health fairs where they're providing the same service that you provide, so you know that they're also an HIV prevention provider. But you may not know what their real strengths are as an organization or what other aspects they draw on.

Lester O.R.: I realize we haven't talked about how you get this information. So just really briefly, 15 minutes on a competitors website, will yield you a great deal of understanding [00:48:00] about not only who they are but how they want to present themselves, and then there are lots of other sources. Again, talking with folks who work there is really a good thing to do, kind of staying in touch with your field that way. And then also 990, you can always go ... 990's are available for non-profits. There are really easy sources for that.

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Elena F.: The 990's being those annual tax reports that non-profits have to file and that are typically ... Some of you may be involved in filing them, but in case that's not part of your scope, they are pretty easy to get a hold of, especially now in an electronic age.

We do have a slide that lists some of those kinds of resources, and the internet is an amazing resource, even just subscribing to the Facebook page of one of your competitors, you'll suddenly get maybe a whole different perspective about how they operate than you might have had before. Annual reports as well. I think the things that Lester just mentioned are a number of these.

Again, your staff who interact directly with the staff of other organizations in the community, I think ... A couple of you spoke earlier about some real collaborative processes with other entities, so I don't want to give the impression that this has to be a steal operation. Certainly, you would want to start even a very open conversation with another organization with some background knowledge. And there are great ways to get that. But having in-depth conversations with folks that you want to form a partnership with makes sense at a certain stage in the process where you know what you're coming to the table with and how you want to address that with them.

I think the other thing that we didn't talk about explicitly were these key informant interviews. Lester mentioned that you might want to speak with funders, especially if you have a high level of trust with those funders. Maybe they're invested in your organization and you're willing to kind of take a step back [00:50:00] and think more broadly with you. Other community leaders and, again, your competitors might be folks that you could speak with as well.

I think we want to go ahead and open the phone lines again, and just to ask you all, because it sounds like you've been doing some work to figure these things out within your own communities and within the field that you work in. So which of these types of processes have you used to learn more about your competitors, and what has your experience been with that?

Lester O.R.: Yeah, when I think ... and even more generally, I'm kind of interested if this is ... if it's something you've even thought about doing or tried to engage in at all.

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Candia Clarke: This is Candia. Actually, we ... a [inaudible 00:50:56] organization actually got ... we were simply, August of this year, merged with another organization, at least the two boards had a unanimous vote to a merger with one of the organizations in our community that we considered to be one of our biggest competitors. That's what happened in August of last year.

The newly formed organization right now, I think together, we represent a continuum of services that, individually, we couldn't have had before, and now I think we have a much stronger position and competitive advantage.

Elena F.: Can you talk a little bit about ... Where there specific steps you all went through to kind of hone in on what you were each bringing in terms of a competitive advantage?

Candia Clarke: We went through [00:52:00] a very long strategic planning process that involved leadership and board, and I think the whole merger started with very strong leadership, and some of the [inaudible 00:52:18] from the [inaudible 00:52:20] ...

Elena F.: We're losing you a little bit. I think ... Make sure ... I'm sorry, I just want to make sure we can hear what you're ... We're having a little bit of trouble hearing what you're saying. I think when you're talking directly into your speaker we can hear you more clearly.

Candia Clarke: Okay, does that sound better?

Elena F.: Yeah, much better. Go ahead.

Candia Clarke: Okay. I think the leadership of both executive directors of each of these organizations really first had a good relationship but also were competitive in their own ways and agreed that given shrunken resources, given the shift in treatment as prevention, [inaudible 00:53:08] emphasis on more a medical-oriented approach to HIV prevention, we needed to really rethink strategically how we were both going to survive in a community.

I think that started ... I think also, our leadership attended the UCLA [inaudible 00:53:34] on leadership training that was typically funded by Johnson & Johnson. I think La Piana is a big part of that leadership ... executive leadership training opportunity. I think a lot of us were inspired

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by that. I think that [inaudible 00:53:57] [00:54:00] the smoothness of the whole merger and transition.

Elena F.: Great. Thanks for sharing that. I think that what you bring up about having sort of an external opportunity for folks to start thinking about these things in a different way, and even with potential partners like the leadership program that you all participated in, can be a really effective way to kind of either start or shift a conversation or either the way that an organization itself is thinking about things internally.

Candia Clarke: Right.

Elena F.: Anyone else want to jump in with ways that you've looked at assessing your own competitive advantage or that of other folks in your field?

Cathleen Maine: This is Cathleen again. Our agency, right now, is currently going through a strategic planning process that started six months ago. We've done a lot of this [SWAT 00:54:55] analysis that goes hand-in-hand with that process, including with stakeholders and currently this week with clients, and that's been really, really useful for us.

Elena F.: That's great. And have you, with clients, delved into some of these questions about the competitive advantage?

Cathleen Maine: Yes, we have. I don't have the data though unfortunately.

Lester O.R.: And this whole way of thinking, if you think of the traditional [SWAT 00:55:27] approach, it's almost like taking the S part of the approach and blowing it way up so that, especially compared to challenges or weaknesses, it is certainly similar to what you would do in a [SWAT 00:55:47] analysis, but it really puts a huge emphasis on the strengths part.

Elena F.: Great. Well, thank you for sharing. Anyone else want to jump in [00:56:00] before we move to our next piece? Okay. It sounds like some of you are right in the depths, or have recently done, sort of this key informant process with clients that might take more the form of a focus group or a different kind of one-on-one conversation, but folks sometimes ask us, "Well, what would be the topics? How would you have this conversation with a funder or with a partner or some other stakeholder in the community?"

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So this is just a sampling of questions that you can ask, starting out with asking what the understanding of that entity or that person is, about your own organization, can be very enlightening. And I've done this with organizations where we get a wide variety of responses depending on which of their stakeholders that we're talking to. So just to understand both kind of ... the information that people in the community have absorbed about an organization, but also kind of how they've been ... I guess, what their brands means to other folks.

Along those same lines, asking about the organization strengths as a partner, or a grand key, or a service provider, all those different roles that you as an organization provide, again, what we perceive our own strengths to be may not necessarily be what those that we work with value the most or see as being really key in terms of their relationship with us.

And then understanding under what circumstances our partners refer clients to us, if that's part of the relationship. Again, this helps you to understand what other resources they're aware of in the community and how they might choose to use you rather than other resources and what might motivate that as well.

I think you can ask ... and you might not ask the question exactly this way, but say it's some questions, and get to a question that asks, [00:58:00] "What comes to mind when you think of our organization? What is our reputation? What are our strengths?" And that can be ... a very important piece, both to identify strength, and then sometimes also to identify what some caveats might be.

Then again, just asking sort of very directly, "What is this most important strength of ours? What's your perspective as a stakeholder?" So all of these can be really helpful in seeing how other entities view your organization. Often, it's helpful to have a neutral third-party who's conducting the interviews, especially if there is a strong staff-to-staff relationship or personal relationship of any kind with the key informant. Just knowing that they're having a third person hear that information allows them to be a little more candid.

Any other questions that you all have used in these ... We'll unmute you again. Just questions that you've used in key-informant interviews or in your focus groups or other work that you've done to learn from your partners or others in the organization?

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Candia Clarke: Yeah, we've tried to find out who funds them and whether we have similar funders in common, and what components their programming, these funders ... contributing to. It's-

Elena F.: That's a great piece of information to get. You don't necessarily have to ask that in an interview, but if you have other ways of finding it out. But that's great. Others? (pause) Okay. I think we're going to have you now ... kind of reflect, and you may have done this already, it sounds like some of you have done a lot of thinking about this, but we're going to put up a poll here that asks you what your main competitive advantage is as an organization. [01:00:00]

We have some options up here that you can choose as soon as I pass the ball back to Morgan. Sorry. (pause) Okay. The poll should be popping up here, and if one of these options is not the one that you would list, go ahead and choose other and then you can share that in a chat or we'll open the phone lines again for you to share. (pause)

Okay. We're going to go ahead and share the results and then we'll unmute the phones too, because I think ... Okay. This is interesting. Of those of you, we have kind of a spread across these, but the unique programmatic approach is one that a number of folks have identified as being their strengths. Anyone want to speak to that in terms of what that means for your organization? Anyone who chose that unique programmatic approach? (pause)

Okay, maybe they don't want to give away competitive advantage. (laughs) [01:02:00] Okay, great. That's a good ... The cost effectiveness, I think was an interesting one that one of you chose as well, and I think that's something that's getting a lot more attention lately. So being able to really hone in on that and be able to be precise about how that's an advantage is impressive. Okay-

Lester O.R.: Yeah, just on that note, I would just add that, in various fields, people are thinking of partnering with insurance companies. Certainly in HIV, that's a live issue. And both cost effectiveness and uniqueness of program are really critical competitive advantages that you can bring to a large ... the super-huge providers like that, and it's very compelling to them.

Elena F.: Yeah, it's a good point. Both, insurance companies, and also just health care networks, or-

Lester O.R.: Health care networks, yes. Exactly. I should have added that. Exactly.

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Elena F.: Great. We're going to speak more to this ... Sorry. I just want to make sure I didn't miss a slide. But as we've said before, understanding what your true strengths are, and as Lester said, your strengths that separate you or that are unique to you within your field, can help you really identify what that advantage is that you bring to the table. And once you know that advantage, you can continue to build it and to really leverage it.

One thing that we wanted to note is that sometimes when you conduct this kind of analysis, you could draw a blank. It could be that you have a number of strengths, but they're not particularly unique in the field. You're good at what you do, but there's others who are good at what they do too. Or maybe it's a time when your organization has been struggling a little bit [01:04:00] to really hone in on what those strengths are.

So this can certainly be an outcome, that it's had to really identify what that clear strength is, and in that case, what you might want to do is back up a little bit and look at the strengths again and say, "Okay, are there strengths here that we could build into a bigger advantage than what we have right now? And what would it take to do that?" Or, along those same lines, we don't have any strengths that set us apart, but maybe we have some really good strengths, and if we could couple them with a very unique strength that another partner has, then as a unit ...

As one of you was speaking with before, I don't know if that was part of your analysis or not with your partnership, but how could we, with a partnership, still address our mission but have a more unique position within the market? Then the other possibility is, it could be that there is not really even another organization that has an advantage or has a unique thing that the market needs.

And this is, I think, with a lot of health care related pieces right now, people are working to be the first to develop what the market needs. It's not that someone else has that advantage out there, it's a need that hasn't been met, and so what does the market need and how can we leverage those strengths that we have and build them into an advantage that's needed in the field?

Lester, anything to add about that?

Lester O.R.: Yeah. Only just to really emphasize this. What you do not see as an option here is you do not see continued to operate with some great

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strengths and no competitive advantage. We just don't really see that as a viable option for organizations, because ultimately it means you're not bringing a value that is needed that others can't provide. I've worked with some organizations ... sometimes this conversation leads to that [01:06:00] leads to that partnership question, and that partnership question could really be, either, about merger, or, it could be something else; a different type of partnership.

Actually, I'm working with an organization right now where that's really very much what they've gotten to. Because they're a fantastic organization with great services, but they realize that they are just one of many providers and they couldn't really define what they did differently. They're doing a two-fold strategy around that. One is to define a next step that kind of captures their strengths on how they work together and step up the organization and their services so that it really does distinguish them in its totality. Which they haven't done to this point. And then simultaneously, to pursue partnerships where they can ... where the strengths complement each other so that they can really distinguish themselves.

Again, just the point, there is no bullet on here that says, "Just continue to operate." You should either do something about it or you should really not continue operating, because you're not using your resources really effectively. That's a little harsh, but that's really how I see it.

Elena F.: Thanks, Lester. I think that is ... I think there are organizations that are in that position and don't have someone delivering that message. I think that's where, then, you're fine for a year or two, but then you hit one of those moments that's sort of like, "Oh, my goodness, now we've lost this opportunity to develop and advantage we could be using at this point."

Lester O.R.: Yeah, that's right.

Elena F.: Thanks for adding that. Okay. I think just again we'll open up the phone lines and just another opportunity to say within the course of this conversation or as you think about the emerging HIV environment, are there other ... are there particular strengths that you think community-based organizations [01:08:00] working in HIV prevention today need to have? Just your own thoughts about those. (pause) Anyone? (pause)

Candia Clarke: I think [inaudible 00:01:08:24] change ... on change, goes back to leadership change ... leadership ... Sort of helping organizations to be able to manage these changing environments and develop strategies to

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adapt, be competitive, in order to continue to serve the community and be valuable.

Elena F.: Great. So some real specific leadership strengths that are needed.

Alexia: Something I think, this is Alexia, is that it's really important to be able to see the big picture in these times and kind of see all the different players and how all the different priorities are coming into play, and then look at your own strengths in your own community and how they can fit in nicely. I think so, then, it's hard to get all that information to be really able to make a good decision or [inaudible 01:09:27].

Elena F.: Mm-hmm (Affirmative). Yup. It's a good fact to understanding what that field really is and how you fit in. Anyone else?

Cathleen Maine: This is Cathleen. I think one of the things that has been beneficial for us has been an ability to advocate on behalf of our clients, with our clients, and with our funders. And being able to take that direct service experience [01:10:00] and translate it into advocacy strategies is incredibly important right now as things are changing so rapidly.

Elena F.: That's a great point. Are there specific things that have allow you to do that? I'm thinking like maybe you have really good data about your clients and their experience, or ... Yes. Go ahead.

Cathleen Maine: Yes. I think part of it is just our rich history as a grassroots agency. Being founded at that level and turning ourselves from a support group into an actual direct service agency, and keeping that thread throughout our history, we also have direct funding to do advocacy and that helps a lot. But we've also fostered a network within our agency and we empower the clients and participants of programs to join that effort at whatever level they're able to do. And it's very intergenerational, and that's another thing that sort of makes it successful, because it's client-informed.

Elena F.: Terrific. I think in particular for HIV agencies, having a very genuine and powerful connection to the client is very helpful.

Lester O.R.: Yeah. And not all HIV service providers can do that, because they've been set up more as a more traditional service provider. So that is something you can really think about using. Again, I know I use these ugly words like

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"use" and "leverage", but that really is what it is, as long as it's towards the mission and toward the good.

Elena F.: I'm going to kind of dip through the next couple of slides that we have, because I think you're all thinking about this already, but one of the things that we wanted to distinguish is that you may—and you've spoken to this quite a bit—think about your competitive advantage at a programmatic level [01:12:00] or at an organizational level. A lot of, I think, what we've been talking about in our conversation today has been kind of at that organizational leadership level and kind of very conceptual big-picture level, which is very important. And those are critical competitive advantages to be aware of and to nurture.

I think the other piece is that you may have a competitive advantage that's expressed in a specific program. And it may just be within that specific program or it may go across program. For example, just to build on what was just shared, if you have an advocacy program, that it may have its own internal strengths, but you may be leveraging that to the broader organization.

You may have a substance abuse program, just to pull an example out of a hat, that has a very strong understanding of the substance abuse environment, and that's a real strength, but it may not necessarily be a competitive advantage across programs or at the organizational level. So spending some time thinking about those distinctions and playing them out is an important step in really thinking about what all your competitive advantages are as well as what strengths are that may exist within one part of your agency that you could then build into an agency-wide competitive advantage, if that makes sense.

And I just wanted to share. Anyone in the HIV prevention world is probably getting a little tired of this slide. The name keeps changing on it, so it keeps it fresh, but I think it is a useful tool as we think about the HIV care continuum in the way it breaks down in terms of just, that working directly with people with HIV, in linking to care the various steps. And it can be a tool for thinking about your own organization's strategic advantages, and so ... [01:14:00]

I hope you can see this well enough on the screen, but what I'm sharing now is a graphic that comes from the Cascade AIDS project. And what they did was think about, on the top part of this screen, they kind of pulled out key elements of the national HIV/AIDS strategy and then their own strengths as an organization; supporting an empowering people

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affected by HIV, eliminating HIV related stigma, really being very deliberate about identifying what are the ways in which they work or their objectives that relate to that broader field or environment.

Then, in terms of breaking down the work that they do, this graphic doesn't illustrate specific strengths that they have, but it did help them start thinking about, "Where does our work fall along this continuum?" And they simplified the continuum a little bit, so we've got HIV infected diagnosed, linked to care, so that it would work for them and they could think about where their programming fits in.

So this is one example of a way to kind of related current programs to a broader field or environment and start thinking about where things fall to then be able to really be specific about strengths that could be leveraged. And, the folks at Cascade AIDS project shared this with us well over a year ago, so I can't say it's like their most updated version, but they were more than happy to have it shared with other folks just as an example of what they had done. I just want to give them a call out for that.

Then the other piece to this advantage is really being able to demonstrate and communicate the value of the services that your organization provides or of your competitive advantage specifically. Here we have an example [01:16:00] of what is maybe a much less effective communication of an advantage. If we say our clients love us, it's a very sort of generic statement and it's hard to dispute. You know that your clients love you, but most service organizations can say this, because the clients that they are currently seeing are clients who do love them and are grateful for the services that they're getting.

It doesn't convey much specificity in terms of what that organization's real strengths are. This other statement is quite a bit more specific: "Insured clients choose us over for-profit alternatives because we offer comprehensive health and well-being services." It gets a sense that the organization is rising above the competition, even a competition that might, just at face value, people might perceive to be higher quality at first even if that's not necessarily the case. So to say, "Folks are choosing us over a for-profit alternative, and the reason they're doing that is because we have those particular strengths. We're offering comprehensive health and well-being services." That's just as an example of a more fleshed out statement of an organization's strength and value.

Lester, did you want to add anything about that?

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Lester O.R.: No. I think that's really good. Actually, I will add one quick thing, which is just kind of what I had been talking about before, which is that the purpose of having competitive advantage, and understanding it, is really to guide you. So when you say something like "our clients love us", that isn't really helpful if you're choosing among five different great opportunities of how you can change or grow the organization, it doesn't provide you much guidance as opposed to the second example which will really inform the choices you make and [01:18:00] how you implement those choices. That's the real solid value of thinking about competitive advantage.

Elena F.: Great. I think we're going to ... Les is going to go on to talk about some common pitfalls for the assessment process ...

Lester O.R.: Yeah. Sorry. I should have gone right on. So ... And we are watching the clock. We have just a few minutes. We want to leave a little bit of time at the end if people have further questions. I'll be quick about this. You see these bullets? I think they're pretty self-explanatory. As you pursue this, things that you might commonly do wrong. One is believing everything you believe. Meaning you don't test it, you don't keep a cynical little voice in your head that says is that really true and how can I find out if that good thing we do is really true and really useful. So that's what that is about: checking your assumptions.

The same thing happens, by the way, when people analyze their competitors. Another organization may just have a reputation for something, and actually they're not executing on it very well, or you only see what [inaudible 01:19:10] they do, and you have a hard time seeing about some things they do really, really well. That's a very common pitfall.

The way you address that is by involving those diverse perspectives, and I think we've really walked through pretty thoroughly what those diverse perspectives are. Then this final point. I think you all understand it. When you are soliciting diverse perspectives, you have to project the safety of it, that you're not going to be defensive about the feedback, you're really just gathering information. You have to think of yourself, or whoever is getting that information, as a reporter just reporting, gathering information and reporting on it, and not being defensive.

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I'm biased, because I'm a consultant [01:20:00], but as Elena said earlier, this is something that consulting could be really useful in. People will tell consultants things they will not tell staff or their friends, so sometimes that's really useful.

Elena F.: We had another chat opportunity here, and it sounds like a number of you have already taken some steps to assess your competitive advantage, so we could change the phrase of this to say, "Is there a step that you would take now based on this conversation today, or one that you have used recently, in terms of looking at what your competitive advantage is as an organization that you would share with the other participants?" Anyone want to share?

Candia Clarke: I would say organizational culture is also a good ... how would I say ... indicator of your competitor's advantages, so the more you can find out about organizational culture could help prepare you for what your own strategy is and how you can make some adjustments on your end as well.

Elena F.: Yeah, that's good, and I think that's an area where, what Lester was just talking about, in terms of knowing what you know can be dangerous. So using a tool that really is objective in a process that can get you some objective information about what your culture feels like from a variety of perspectives within the organization is really helpful.

Lester O.R.: Yeah.

Elena F.: Anyone else?

Cathleen Maine: This is Cathleen again. I think I would also-

Elena F.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

Cathleen Maine: Whoops. Can you hear me?

Elena F.: Yes. Go ahead.

Cathleen Maine: Oh, I'm sorry. I think the other thing too that you guys touched upon that I think is really key is having an external [01:22:00], outside neutral facilitator for some of this. I think that's the best way to learn truth about perceptions around your agency, and without that, I think it's really hard to move forward as you guys have pointed out.

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Elena F.: Mm-hmm (Affirmative). Yeah. I think, both, in terms of how objective the information is, but also the role that it puts people in internally within the organization. So having to present that tough information if you're also then working with folks on an ongoing basis can be tricky.

Lester O.R.: Yeah. There's also a kind of perspective that can be really helpful. You know your organization in your field, and sometimes having somebody who ... You know, as part of my job, people tell me ... every day they tell me things they don't like about their organization, or about other people in their organization, or about other organizations in their field, and you learn to kind of weigh that information to get a little perspective on it.

Part of my job is to not overreact to that information, but to understand it and know where it's rooted, kind of where it's bigger and more important than in other situations and where it's interesting but not really the critical issue at hand. And you can get that kind of perspective with some outside help.

Elena F.: I think just because of time, we're going to move on. We want to get you out of this session right on time, and we appreciate all the great participation and hope that you'll continue that in the next couple sessions. I think you've been getting to know each other a little bit on this call. Hopefully you'll jump in just as much in our next couple of opportunities.

The next steps, in terms of the series, is we're going to share with you a worksheet that can be used for assessing your competitive advantage. In just a second I'll show you a screenshot of that [01:24:00], and it kind of just walks you through a series of questions. We're not going to go through it in depth, but if you have questions about it, you could bring those next time or certainly at that last opportunity that we have to talk on the 28th.

But we would love your observations and your questions, either about completing this worksheet, or about similar processes that you have used. What we would suggest with this worksheet is, and I'm just going to bring it up here on the screen. You'll see it on the very top. Hopefully you can read it. That it says, "Continuum stage address." And so you could use this broadly for your organization, but you could also choose, and this is sort of how we built it, to say, "Okay, in terms of the HIV care

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continuum, when it comes to," let's just choose, "linking people to care, how do we identify our competitive advantage within that realm?"

It's really up to you whether you want to do it organization-wide, but if you've already done that, you may find it helpful to choose one of these specific areas to focus in on. Then the tool walks you through a series of questions, "What's the role of your organization in that stage? What are your core strengths? What services do other organizations provide and in what ways are they exceptional?" And then it walks you through your own strengths as well on the second page.

We'll send this out after the webinar with the slides and encourage you to take some time between now and the 28th, if not, the 21st, knowing that, that's just around the corner, to complete the worksheet. We'd love to hear your feedback both on the worksheet and the process.

Any questions about the worksheet before we move on? (pause) Okay, so, just a couple of things, actually. I'm going to go on to the next slide [01:26:00] and then we'll make sure we leave time for questions at the end. We are going to ask you to respond to a survey about this webinar, and we'll do that for each of them that are a part of the series, but you will get that. Morgan is sitting here right next to me typing furiously. So I think she's going to send a link through chat box for that survey that you can copy and paste into your browser, there it is.

We do ask you to please fill that out. We do use that information to help us as we plan future webinars or tweak similar ones for the future. Then also again, please do remember to participate next Tuesday, where we'll be talking about another series of tools and then again on the 28th where we'll have more time for you to just ask any questions that you have around the process or share your observations with Lester, myself, and with your colleagues at that time.

And so, then, just some additional resources here, that I'm noting, that will be in the slides that are sent to you. I think with that, we'll end, but we'll stay on ... I know it's just now half-past, but we're here for questions for a couple minutes if folks have any they want to ask at this point. For observation.

Lester O.R.: Yes. And I'm also more than happy to stick around for a few minutes if people do want to chat a little bit. And for those who have to get off the line, I just want to thank you very much for participating and for the really nice conversation.

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Elena F.: Now I feel bad. It's always nice when we have folks who will share their experience and chime in. It really makes it a richer experience for everyone. Any questions at this point? Feel free to jump in. (pause) All right. [01:28:00] But, I think we'll go ahead and end. Thank you everyone for your time, and we'll look forward to talking with you next week.

Candia Clarke: Bye.

Lester O.R.: Thanks, everybody. Bye-bye.

Candia Clarke: Thank you. (pause)