

## Understanding Information Sharing Capability

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The concept of information sharing capability used here comes from a combination of research and consultation with government professionals. It balances two different notions of capability. First, that capability can be assessed along a set of generic dimensions that apply in practically any information sharing situation. Second, that these generic dimensions may be applied or interpreted differently, depending on the nature of a particular initiative. Therefore different initiatives would be expected to have different profiles of capability across these dimensions. This approach is reflected in four assumptions about information sharing capability.

Capability is:

- **multidimensional**—it is made up of several dimensions, all of which contribute to overall information sharing capability.
- **complementary**—high or low overall levels of capability can result from different combinations of factors, high levels in some dimensions can often compensate for lower levels in others.
- **dynamic**—it can increase or diminish due to changes within an initiative or in its external environment.
- **specific to its setting**—some elements of capability apply to all settings, but capability for any particular project must be assessed relative to its own specific objectives and environment.

The interorganizational nature of most information sharing efforts suggests two additional ideas for capability assessment.

First, **the success of information sharing depends on the combination of capabilities that exist among the sharing partners.** Not all organizations need the same capability profile. Instead, the combination of capability profiles across a set of agencies sharing information determines the effectiveness of an initiative.

And, second, **the knowledge and experience required for effective assessment can be found in the people working on the effort.** The necessary combinations of knowledge and experience may not exist in a single organization, but may be available as a result of joining forces across the multiple organizations involved in a cross-boundary sharing initiative.