

A photograph of a young child with dark, curly hair, seen from behind, sitting at a green table in a classroom. The child is wearing a yellow t-shirt. In the background, there is a computer monitor and a chalkboard.

firetree circle

ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

Photo credit: Stairway Foundation

This document outlines Firetree's framework for understanding our partners and the potential of their work and their readiness and fit to be included in the Circle. It reflects the way we think about the mature organisations we invest in — not as a checklist to be completed, but as a living guide to the values, qualities, and capabilities that we believe matter most in driving meaningful, lasting change.

The Firetree Rubric is organised into four sections: Non-negotiables, Model and Impact, People and Culture, and Governance and Operations. Each section captures a dimension of how we assess the strength, integrity, and potential of an organisation. Within each section, categories are described by a short descriptor and accompanied by the criteria we use to guide our thinking.

This is not a static assessment tool. It is a reflection of Firetree's way — how we see the world, what we believe makes a strong partner, and how we continue to learn and evolve alongside the organisations we support.

Our Approach

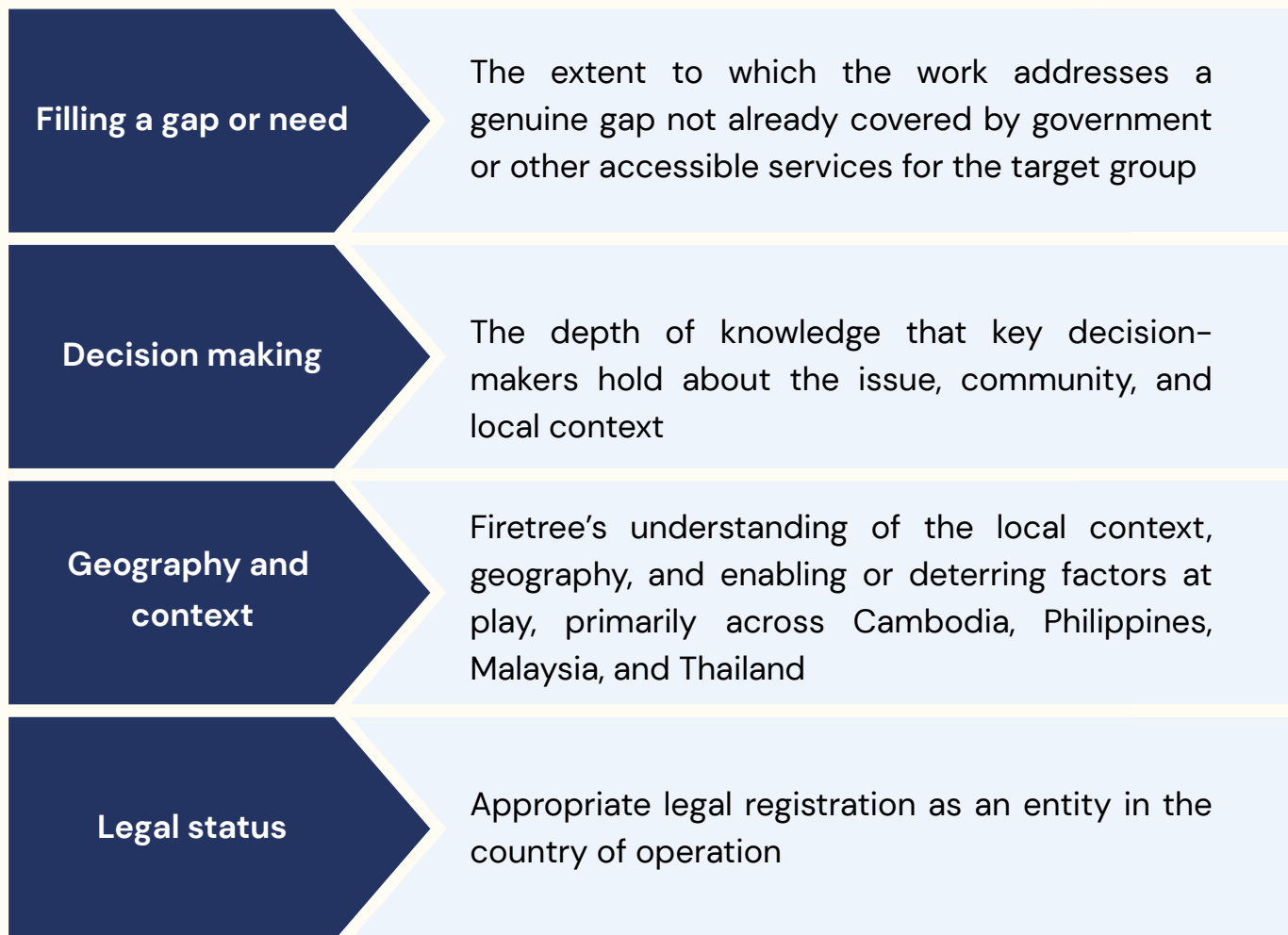
This rubric is applied by the Firetree team, drawing on the knowledge and perspective built through sustained, direct engagement with partners during our 20+ years of operations. In areas beyond child protection, social work and education, we bring in experts from our networks to contribute their assessment.

This is not a one-time exercise. Our understanding of each organisation develops continuously, shaped by the time we spend with leadership and teams, during our frequent visits and ongoing communication, our presence in the field alongside the organization, and the expertise and relationships we build over years.

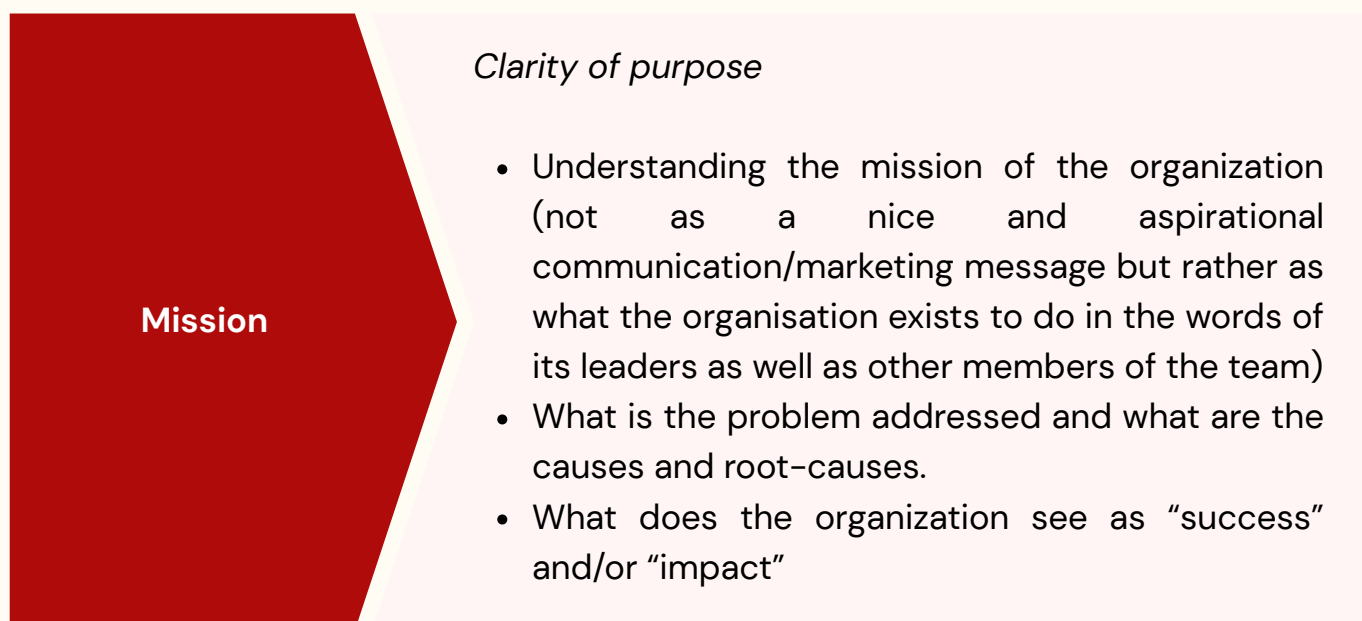
The framework guides how we see and interpret what we observe — it is embedded in how we work, not separate from it.

On an annual basis, Firetree will share its perspective on each partner, developed through this rubric, with the funders who join the Circle.

Non-negotiables



Model & Impact



Model

The quality and coherence of program activities, how they connect to each other, and how they build toward the intended mission.

- How logically the program activities address the identified causes of the problem
- Activities link to each other in the way that allows them to provide the solution needed
- Specific partners are in place for key additional linkages, services and activities
- The approach to client support is defined and implemented until the defined outcome is achieved
- Community awareness is built through multiple channels, ensuring people know what the organisation does, how to find it, and how to access support

Client centric

The approach to identifying and understanding client needs, and how centrally those needs drive program decisions.

- Every program team member understands who the client is
- Program team(s) understand how to identify the specific challenges facing the client
- Program team is able to create an individualised plan as needed to meet the specific needs of the client as opposed to implement cookie cutter solution

Community oriented

The degree to which the work and team are embedded in and trusted by the communities they serve, treating them as partners.

- Team members are clearly known and welcomed in the community
- Direct experience and interactions with the community and clients are reported back to the organization

Learning agility

The capacity to revisit and adapt the approach based on learning from community interactions and context shifts.

- Continuously revisits issues and evolves the model in response to changing realities
- Identifies trends and patterns through direct experience with the community
- Identifies and collaborates with the most suitable stakeholders and partners to address challenges as they emerge

Achievements and accomplishments

Evidence of past performance and the meaningful positive change achieved.

- Has achieved what they define as success in their programs
- Long term positive change as a result of their programs or through partnerships
- When appropriate/possible, behavioural change is sought as a long-term solution to the problem

Measuring impact

The quality of systems in place to track outcomes, learn from data, and adapt over time.

- The organisation collects relevant data (quantitative and qualitative) to understand whether the programs are working
- Data is used effectively to learn and adapt the program
- Key changes and decisions are informed by the data collected and the relevant teams are involved in the decisions
- Specific data and the implications from the data is shared with relevant teams, management and board
- As programs or the realities of their context change, the data and learning mechanisms also adapt to match appropriately
- Data and learnings are shared with other stakeholders and when possible with policy makers



Photo credit: Baan Dek Foundation

Management team

The complementarity of expertise across the management team and the absence of over-reliance on any single individual.

- Each area of the organisation has a clear leadership owner for that type of direction
- The organization has a good amount of talent who can be promoted in leadership roles and a demonstrated career progression for valuable staff
- Leadership and decision-making are shared across the team, rather than concentrated in one voice
- Management team is able to hold each other accountable and disagree when needed
- Comprised of the appropriate mix of individuals for the type and size of the organisation
- Low turnover and strong average tenure across the management team

Program lead(s)

The program lead(s)' ability to manage the teams, foster open communication, and maintain relationships with key stakeholders.

- Has/Have the relevant experience and understanding of the context needed to lead the program
- Build/s trusting long-term relationships with other relevant stakeholders needed to deliver the program
- Support/s learning and professional growth of the team
- Engage/s with the community on a regular basis to learn and adapt

Teams

Clarity of roles within the team and ensuring key members have the competencies and experience needed to deliver the program effectively.

- The team is structured with all the necessary roles to deliver the program effectively
- All roles are clearly defined and the individuals in these roles have the relevant skills and experiences
- The team works collaboratively as needed
- The team demonstrates stability and continuity over time
- Role, training & supervision of Volunteers if any along with the #s of volunteers

Culture

The openness, collaboration, and balance between accountability and inclusivity within the organisation.

- All program teams operate in sync and collaborate with each other as default
- Staff voice their, ideas, opinions and dissent freely and as needed
- Has a mechanism to collect staff feedback, with appropriate engagement by management and Board
- The wellbeing, including mental health, of the staff is a demonstrable priority of the management and Board
- Staff are rewarded and promoted due to performance rather than exclusively by seniority

Photo credit: M'lop Tapang



Understanding of SOPs

Core processes are documented and consistently understood and followed by staff.

- Has strong SOPs for programmatic work, including case management, and ensures the team is regularly trained on their implementation
- Has strong SOPs for operational processes and regular training for these SOPs
- These SOPs are regularly reviewed and feedback from staff, clients, community incorporated
- SOPs are known, understood and followed by team members

Financial management

The openness, collaboration, and balance between accountability and inclusivity within the organisation.

- Strong financial systems and internal audits and policies are in place
- Stock and Inventory management is adequate
- Finance head and team are qualified for their roles
- Annual external audit of the financial statements
- Comply with national requirements regarding severance pay, provident fund, tax rules

Photo credit: Friends International



Compliance and policies

Appropriate policies across HR, finance, child protection and safeguarding are in place and actively implemented, with appropriate legal registration as an entity in the country of operation.

- Comprehensive HR Policy and Staff Manual are complete, clear and adhere or go beyond the national minimum standards set by law.
- Child Protection and Safeguarding:
 - Known, understood and implemented by all staff;
 - Clear internal and external reporting mechanisms;
 - Code of Conduct for staff, volunteers, visitors are available and regularly used;
 - All staff are trained annually
- All Policies are implemented in practice
- Adequate onboarding and offboarding process
- Staff has access to policies and is regularly trained through onboarding and other forums
- Employment contracts are fair and in line or beyond the standards set by national Labour Law
- Has a reserve policy and is able to deploy reserves before reducing salaries and/or retrenching staff

Photo credit: Stairway Foundation



Board and governance

The engagement and diversity of the board, and its ability to hold the organisation accountable to its mission and strategy.

- An engaged and diverse board with relevant expertise and at least one third (1/3) of the members of the board have contextual knowledge of the community and issues addressed by the organization
- Strategy is designed by leadership and management in collaboration with the team
- The Board holds management accountable to the mission and strategy
- Treasurer has the required technical skills
- Board meets regularly (not less than trice per year) and there is clear evidence of ongoing communication between leadership, Chairperson and between management and other key board members

Revenue strategy

The clarity and coherence of the fundraising strategy and how directly it is tied to programmatic priorities and long-term sustainability.

- Fundraising team is structured effectively based on their fundraising strategy
- Has an appropriate mix of funders without overdependence (>25% of funding from same source) from one donor
- Limited dependence on short-term, restricted grants or clear strategy to achieve it.
- Program teams or individuals with current knowledge of the programs are involved with the fundraising process



Photo credit: Stairway Foundation

Get Involved

To learn more, visit www.firetreecircle.org.