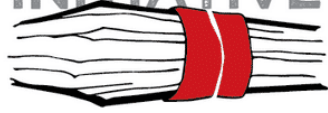# Understanding State Capabilities

About Understanding State Capabilities

Public systems across sectors in India are inadequate and the lack of accountability is a binding constraint. While the government attempts to deliver on its own commitment of a transparent, decentralised and well-functioning state, public authorities seem to lack both- the capacity (technical and administrative) and ability (political and institutional) to deliver public goods, characterising India's state capabilities as weak. This cavity in the system leaves a significant need to enhance the competency of administrative systems and its human resources.

'Understanding State Capabilities' places state capability at the front of the debate on governance and accountability. By underlining the capability gap in the governance structure, participants are equipped to understand the root causes of administrative failure on the ground.

At the end of the course, participants will be able to:

- Build a nuanced understanding of government structures
- Learn why state capability matters in service delivery implementation
- Assess weaknesses and gaps in service delivery implementation based on the foundation of your understanding of state capability
- Learn about the importance and relevance of social accountability
- Apply a systems thinking approach to building state capability at the frontline

What kind of participants have taken this course earlier?

The online version of this course has been conducted with organisations such as Indian School of Development Management and International Innovation Corps Fellowship at the University of Chicago. Our online participants come from different organisations such as the PRS Legislative Research, Civic Data Lab, Central Square Foundation, PATH etc.

Who is the course for?

Ideal candidates for the course will have some experience working with governance systems, or would have been associated with the development sector, or public policy. However, it is not mandatory for participants to have prior knowledge on the topics, interest and passion will suffice. Students coming from various backgrounds such a public policy, economics and political science can benefit from the course.

What is the idea behind the course?

The course aims to detangle complex ideas and research on governance, state capacity, decentralisation, public finance, budgets, bureaucracy and social accountability. The course draws on real examples from Accountability Initiative's own research work in sectors such as education, health, sanitation, nutrition from across India. The course is an attempt to bridge the gap between policy research and practice, by taking our cutting-edge research to practitioners, enabling them to better understand and engage with the government in their work.

How is the course offered?

We offer the course in a variety of modes. These can further be modified based on organisational needs.

- **Online** - This version of the course is entirely online and self-paced, to be done by the individual participant at a time convenient to them. This includes access to the entire repository of course material. This is designed for individual participants, though larger groups from organisations and institutions can also opt for this.
- **Hybrid** - We are also open to institutional partnerships with organisations in case the number of participants is large enough. This format would include the entire online module and also include add-ons such as live sessions etc.
- **Online** - We also conduct this course online, completely in-person for organisations. The sessions are facilitated by our team. This means that all 20 hours of instruction is conducted in-person over the course of a few days (no online mode).

What are the modules in the course?

The course will take participants on a journey through India's complex government system from the lens of decentralisation. The course is divided into 5 modules:

- Decentralisation
- Public Administration and the Bureaucracy
- Modalities of Public Finance
- Planning and Impact of bureaucratic functioning, government finances and planning on service delivery
- Citizen Participation and Social Accountability

What learning and evaluation methods does the course use?

- In the online course, the content is a mix of different formats such as slides, voiceovers, reading material, videos, and interactive learning tools. The entire course is interspersed with short quizzes that help participants recap key takeaways and assess their learning.

- For the in-person courses, we use a range of group discussions, activities, charts, worksheets, etc., along with presentations and lectures.

What is the duration of the course?

- The complete, standard version (online only) of the course requires approximately 20 hours to complete. We provide a 3-month access to the material. Live sessions are extra and typically last between 60-90 minutes and the schedule is fixed in correspondence with the organisation.
- The course can also be conducted in-person, entirely online. Typical duration for the entire course would be 20 hours, spread over a minimum of 3 days. We also tailor these as per organisational needs if required.

Who has designed the course?

This Understanding State Capabilities course has been designed in-house by the Accountability Initiative Learning and Development team, with support and inputs from the Research team. TR Raghunandan, Advisor at Accountability Initiative, has been instrumental in providing new ideas and inputs for content.

What does the detailed course content look like?

Module	Overview	Sub-Topics
Decentralisation	Participants will learn about decentralisation. India has adopted a decentralized form of governance, and thus knowing this is imperative to understanding how the government functions in India.	The basic concept of decentralization ● Concepts of political and fiscal and administrative decentralisation ● Getting theoretical ● Success and critique of decentralisation ● India's commitment to decentralisation ● What does the decentralised structure of India look like? ● The way forward for decentralisation
Public Administration in India	Participants will learn about people who keep the public administration system running in India. Bureaucrats are key to government functioning, and it is important to understand the structure and conditions of their work in order to engage with them effectively.	● Important theoretical concepts on the bureaucracy ● History and structure of bureaucracy in India ● Bureaucracy and motivation ● Capacity building in the bureaucracy ● Transfers in the bureaucracy ● Everyday life in the bureaucracy ● Complication in bureaucratic functioning ● The way forward for the bureaucracy

Modalities of Public Finance in India	Participants will learn about the finance side of things in the government. This is important to understand because bureaucrats take decisions to spend money in a certain way and that impacts the quality of services.	• Fiscal federalism in India: The rationale and institutional set-up • Fund Transfers in India: Theory vs Reality (focusing on Centrally Sponsored Schemes) • Budgets: Important terms and process and why they should matter to you
Planning and impact of bureaucratic functioning, government finances and planning on service delivery	After learning about public administration and public finance aspects of this India state, participants will understand how it all comes together through planning.	• What is Planning: Introduction to Planning • History of Planning in India Planning in India: The Planning Commission Era • The Planning process for a GPDP Planning process under a scheme: Samagra Shiksha Abhiyaan • How can decentralised planning be designed better?
Citizen Participation and Social Accountability	After having understood government functioning and the planning process, it is important for participants to understand how citizens and practitioners can better engage with government.	• Citizen participation: Importance and Challenges • What is social accountability? • How far have social accountability measures succeeded? • Doing accountability differently

Alumni testimonials

The course helps break the myth that the State is a mysterious monolith. The Modules, through interesting videos, audios and infographics, give us a peek into Who-Does-What-and-How in the State. The course is a practical toolkit to help make sense of Citizen-State interactions. Through USC, I've also learnt the importance of seeking accountability from the right people. I'm thankful to AI for its continuous e forts in making evidence-based research more accessible to others.

- Avani Kaushal, Former LAMP Fellow and UPSC aspirant

The words 'government' or public administrations were hazy terms for me before I participated in 'Understanding State Capabilities'. The course has helped me realize that there is no one, correct way to navigate through complicated government structures. As I prepare to go out and work in the district, I feel like I am much better placed to anticipate the kind of loopholes that I may face as part of the system. The activities conducted during the course proved to be very insightful, and I realized how this balance between local needs and maintaining standardization is challenging. I also realized that I could also make sense of scary looking Budget documents!

- Shruti Bajaj, Former student at Indian School of Development Management

ACCOUNTABILITY INITIATIVE

15 years

We are a research group which works on strengthening transparency and accountability in governance which is responsive to citizen need. We do this through evidence-based research on state capabilities and factors affecting efficient public services delivery in India. We are a part of the Centre for Policy Research, one of India's leading public policy think tanks.

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