Built to Last:
Planning Programmatic Sustainability
A Tip Sheet for Grantees of the Office of Adolescent Health and the Family and Youth Services Bureau

Your organization is doing great work! Young people are receiving vital information and skills that will help them develop into healthy, happy adults. Moreover, your community is on board! While that is exciting, you and your staff might wonder if the program and excitement will continue after the funding ends. Now is the time to build a program that will withstand the test of time. Expanding your sights beyond funding can help you build a program that will grow with your community.

What is Sustainability?
Sustainability is the process of perpetuating your programming by integrating the important aspects into your organizational operations so that your stakeholders can continue to benefit from your work. Frequently, organizations link sustainability exclusively to funding; however, it is helpful to take a broader approach that incorporates developing a stable, effective program along with the funding to support it. Building a program that incorporates best practices for meeting the needs of the youth and community while developing internal capacity to deliver programming will make your program more attractive to your stakeholders and funders. It is useful to approach sustainability as the overall process of developing a highly effective program.

There are generally two kinds of sustainability – organizational and programmatic.

Organizational: Is holistic to the organization. It includes all programming, human resources, overhead costs, and the pursuit of the agency's defined mission.

Programmatic: Is specific to promoting the continuation of individual programs within an organization. Programs generally account for fewer organizational resources while still supporting the organization's mission and values.

This resource focuses on programmatic sustainability.

Common Challenges to Sustainability
Sustaining your work can be challenging because your programs are affected by both internal and external influences. Some commonly cited challenges to sustaining programming include:
- Difficulty planning far enough ahead to secure necessary resources
- A lack of well-documented successes to share with the community and funders, despite the quality of programming
- A lack of stakeholder ownership of the programming
- Finite funding streams and competition with organizations doing similar work

Addressing these issues requires a well-rounded approach to demonstrating the value of your programs to your constituents and makes it attractive to your funders.

Start with the End in Mind: Best Practices in Sustainability[1,2]
Your stakeholders want to see that you are running programs that are worthy of their resources and time. Sustaining your programs means developing a thorough plan from the start and demonstrating how wisely you use your resources. Program planning and improvement are reciprocal with your fundraising efforts. Here's how to start out right – or to start improving now.

1. *Plan (and Document) All Work from the Beginning:*
   a. Clearly documented plans support your team to provide better services. They clarify staff and partner roles and minimize "surprises" during implementation.
   b. Taking time to plan ahead and document along the way minimizes the need to backtrack for reporting and grant writing. This shows your stakeholders how much you value their funds, time, and access to their community.
   c. Your plan, along with your outcomes, indicates where you can make improvements. Your plans can guide you in making the right modifications by providing a "map" of the program activities: how activities were envisioned in relationship to how they were carried out. Funders want to see that you are willing to recognize how you can improve your efforts.

2. *Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI):*
   a. *Definition:* The ongoing process of re-examining your programming and assessing what is working well and what can be improved.
   b. *How to do it:* Collect and use data to drive all changes. This means using quantitative data (survey results, attendance logs, performance measure data, etc.) along with qualitative data (debriefing with facilitators [and accompanying notes], participant interviews, focus groups, etc.) to assess what you should continue and what you can improve. Gathering data from a variety of sources will give you a clearer picture of what was effective and why.
   c. *How it supports sustainability:* The more data you have to show your work continues to meet the needs of your priority population, the more likely stakeholders are to feel good about supporting your work – this includes showing them what you plan to change moving forward.

Self-Assessment: Guiding Questions for Sustainability[3]
Planning your sustainability efforts means asking hard questions about your work. These questions are useful in determining how (and if) you should pursue future resources to continue your work. Answering them as honestly as possible will help launch your efforts, and you'll want to point to specific data points (qualitative and quantitative) to justify your answers.

1. *Should the program we delivered be sustained?*
   Try to avoid assuming that all current programming should be continued exactly as it is now. There may be very good reasons to reassess whether or not a program should be altered or replaced with other services. It is helpful to review the program using a SWOT analysis:

---

[1] Bischoff, Shelli. 2012. *A systems approach.* Nonprofit Impact. http://nonprofitimpact.com/approach/. Accessed June 12, 2012.

[2] Duplechain, Michael. 2000. *Sustainability means more than money.* National Service Resources. http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/sustain-more. Accessed June 12, 2012.

[3] CDC-DRH. Promoting Science-Based Approaches to Teen Pregnancy Prevention Using Getting to Outcomes. Draft 2011. P 10-4.

assessing for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the program. This includes a review of financial assets and diversity of funding sources; review of staffing board members; and review of existing data on program performance.[4]

2. *Does the program continue to address needs in the community?*
Reassessing the needs of your youth will help you best impact their lives. Unless your participants see teen pregnancy prevention as an immediate issue, it is unlikely they will attend your programming or achieve the results you hope they will. This assessment should reveal if new needs have emerged or if your participants need more information about why they should be concerned about teen pregnancy.

3. *Has the program been shown to be effective, or does it have the potential to be effective with feasible improvements?*
If your programming is demonstrating positive results, you will want that documented as clearly as possible. If it seems your programming needs modifications to achieve results, you will need to consult your CQI process. Or perhaps revisit question 2 – are other needs in the community taking precedence over the ones you are addressing?

Empowering Relationships: The Value of Who You know
Your biggest champions are the youth and the community you serve. Intentionally developing relationships that demonstrate how much you value their support will go a long way to building a program that you can continue to implement.

- Strong relationships help you access more participants, and a greater demand for your programming demonstrates the need for the work you do.
- Galvanizing your strongest champions will help you make the case to your stakeholders that your work is valued – never underestimate the importance of a good quote in the press or your reports.
- As funding streams are consolidated, organizations are expected to collaborate more closely than before.
- *How to do this:*
    - Solicit the input of your constituents throughout implementation – their feedback on written materials, classes, recruitment strategies, etc.
    - Establish advisory boards to plan various aspects of your programs – this might include implementation, evaluation, recruitment and retention.
    - Involve youth from the community in planning and implementation – in a way that ensures that they see their input is valued.

Strengthening the Bottom Line: Managing and Leveraging Resources[4]
Programs and organizations should have diversified funding portfolios which include a mix of funding sources such as federal, local, private, and fee-for-service. Funders frequently prefer to support strong, ongoing partnerships and collaborations.

---

[4] JBS International, Inc. Internal memorandum to the Office of Adolescent Health. July 2, 2012.

Diversifying funding for programming reduces the pressure on your budget to renew/replace funding as grant cycles end.

Share Your Successes: Don't Be Afraid to Toot Your Horn
Increasing the visibility of your work – via the press, conference workshops and poster sessions, publishing case studies, etc. – will support your programs in a variety of ways.

- Developing a marketing strategy beyond participant recruitment and retention will increase your visibility and name recognition to both participants and to funders. Your marketing plan should include communicating strategic messages to potential participants, partners and funders.[4]
    - *Note: For those evaluating innovative interventions, be sure to consider how you will share those innovations with others interested in this work. How will you package your new strategies? How will those be disseminated to others looking to implement them?*
- A greater number of potential partners will know about your work and will increase your ability to leverage resources and collaborate with them.
- You will increase the awareness of teen pregnancy prevention as a challenge in your community which will promote a need for the services you are already providing. With a greater demand you can demonstrate the need for expanded support.
- This will promote your reputation in the field and increase your visibility to potential funders.

Resources on Sustainability
Finding a vetted resource to guide your sustainability efforts will help your agency make the right connections and build a case for continuing your work. There are many resources out there to support your planning process.

What to Look for in a Resource:
- A framework with a holistic approach – it focuses on the organization as a whole, including staffing and resources, the community you serve, and funding.
- It should be simple enough that all levels of your organization can understand its approach.

Examples of Resources:[5]
- Nonprofit Impact: www.nonprofitimpact.org
- National Service Resources: http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/sustain-more
    - Toolkit on "how to": http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/toolkit-program-sustainability-capacity-building-and-volunteer-recruitmentmanagement
- Rand Corporation on Getting to Outcomes: http://www.rand.org/health/projects/getting-to-outcomes/documents.html
- *Building capacity and sustainable prevention innovations: a sustainability planning model* by Knowlton Johnson, Carol Hays, Hayden Center, and Charlotte Daley. (Evaluation and Program Planning. Vol. 27, 2. May 2004. P 135-149)

---

[5] These resources are offered as examples and are not specifically endorsed by the Office of Adolescent Health.

- "Sustaining Grassroots Community-Based Programs: A Toolkit for Community- and Faith-Based Service Providers" by SAMHSA: http://store.samhsa.gov/product/Sustaining-Grassroots-Community-Based-Programs/SMA09-4340