



Readiness for Sustaining Getting to Outcomes® Among Local Providers

A Discussion Guide for Technical Assistance Providers

Andrea Lamont
University of South
Carolina

Alexandra Eisler
Healthy Teen Network

Abraham Wandersman
University of South
Carolina

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Healthy Teen Network

1501 St. Paul St., Suite 124

Baltimore, MD 21202

www.HealthyTeenNetwork.org

READINESS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Scientific literature describes *organizational readiness* as a critical aspect of high-quality implementation. Readiness combines the *willingness* and *ability* of an organization to implement and sustain an innovation whether it is a program, policy, or practice. High levels of readiness increase the likelihood an organization can sustain an innovation in ways that are at once effective and efficient. Low levels of readiness may undermine how well it can be sustained and possibly undermine the outcomes an organization has already achieved.

Audience & Purpose

Using an evidence-based approach supports program outcomes and helps to ensure high-quality programming. This discussion guide is a tool for you, a technical assistance provider (TAP), to support implementation partner organizations (partner) in sustaining the use of evidence-based approaches.

Use this guide with your partners who have used *Getting to Outcomes*® (GTO®) to select, plan, implement, and evaluate programming and are now moving away from an intensive, proactive technical assistance (TA) relationship. Although this discussion guide focuses specifically on sustaining the GTO process, the concepts and questions could be adapted to assess readiness to sustain a number of other innovations or evidence-based approaches.

As partners transition toward independent implementation (sustainability), you should assess and focus on their readiness to sustain using an evidence-based approach, in this case GTO. Creating a TA plan focused on building an organization's readiness may impact long-term success by highlighting organizational underpinnings that support quality programming.

This assessment combines a partner's **ability** to sustain GTO with their **willingness or motivation** to do so. Readiness is comprised of several areas (Scaccia et al, in press):

1. **General Capacity** refers to a partners' general structure and functioning;
2. **Innovation-Specific Capacity** refers to the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to sustain GTO; and,
3. **Motivation** refers to the reasons a person would be inclined to or not inclined to use an innovation.

Implications of readiness:

1. Regardless of how much (or how little) *capacity* a partner has to sustain GTO, the partner must be *motivated* to sustain the GTO process.
2. Regardless of how much (or how little) motivation a partner has to sustain GTO, the partner must have the *general capacity* to sustain programming and *innovation-specific capacity* to sustain GTO.
3. A readiness assessment informs TA practices by highlighting areas for improvement regarding partner *capacity* and *motivation*.

WHY ASSESS READINESS NOW?

Readiness is dynamic and changes over time. Partner readiness may ebb and flow throughout a project as new information emerges, the direction of the project shifts, or funding changes. As part of a larger sustainability effort, assessing readiness can support institutionalization of GTO best practices moving forward. As a TA provider, you should assess a partner's readiness and develop a TA plan that will help them boost their readiness to sustain GTO.

OVERVIEW

This guide has three (3) main sections each targeting important aspects of readiness:

- I. *General Capacities;*
- II. *Innovation-Specific Capacity; and*
- III. *Motivation.*

In each section you'll find a table with two columns, one titled "Primary Questions" and the other titled "Further Exploration Questions."

- **Primary Questions** focus the discussion on critical aspects of sustainability. **These questions must be asked.**
- **Further Exploration Questions** help you dig deeper into a particular area based on the partner's responses to primary questions and your existing knowledge of the partner's needs. Use your judgment to select which questions from this column you would like to ask. These questions should be asked as needed.

USING THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE

Prior to using this discussion guide, determine which staff members at the partner organization should participate in the discussion. It is up to you, the TAP, to record partner responses and integrate new information into sustainability and TA plans. We have numbered the questions to help you keep track of partner's responses to specific questions.

You may choose to use this document in different ways and with different levels of intensity. You could ask every question in this guide or work them into conversation. Or you may find you know the answers to many of these questions already and do not need to discuss them with your partner. Additionally, you could prioritize specific areas of this document depending on the needs of your partnering organization.

You could discuss ask these questions in a single session or split this discussion into multiple sessions as appropriate. Take a moment to decide what approach(es) you would like to employ in your readiness assessment work.

Before you begin gathering information about readiness to sustain GTO, determine the best way to record responses, plan next steps, and follow-up. At the end of this document you will find a "TA Planning Worksheet." Consider using this tool to summarize your impressions and note action steps for increasing partner readiness.

ORIENTING QUESTIONS BEFORE GETTING STARTED

Q. Who should I include in the discussion(s)?

A. You should use your knowledge of the partner's organization or consult their leadership to determine who would be best suited to answer the questions in this guide. You may find some questions are better suited for staff in leadership or management roles, and other questions may be better suited for front-line staff. It is up to you to divide the questions as you see fit. It may be helpful to ask some questions to different staff members if you suspect that not all staff members have the same perception or vision of the work they are doing.

You may also choose to ask questions in small groups, or teams, if you think it would help facilitate a dialogue among staff at the partner organization.

Q. What kinds of information am I looking for during the discussion(s)?

A. Generally speaking, you are looking to get a sense of how ready your partner(s) are to sustain using an evidence-based approach in their work, in this case GTO. When you talk with your partner(s), be sure to pay special attention to strengths they can build upon or leverage as well as areas of weakness that need support.

You may use the worksheet at the end of this document to take notes on these strengths and weaknesses.

Q. Do I have to ask all of these questions in one meeting?

A. No. This guide contains many questions that span various topics. You may find that some questions naturally fit into some discussions, while others would be better asked at another time. It may take you/your colleagues some time to gather this information. Be sure to keep track of which questions you have asked and what the answers were.

Q. Do I have to ask the questions exactly as they are written?

A. No. The authors of this document did their best to phrase the questions in plain language, but it may be necessary to rework questions to be most applicable for the community you work in or to best fit the conversations you have with your partners.

If you already know the answer to some questions, you may choose to focus on other questions that better inform your technical assistance. However, it may be helpful to ask them anyway as a way of verifying responses.

Q. I'm worried the people I discuss this with may not be honest in their responses to some of these questions. What should I do?

A. While TAPs hope that they can build a trusting relationship with their partners such that they would be honest, this may come up. If you feel that your relationship with them may cause them to change their answer to be more "desirable," consider having other TAPs at your organization ask some of these questions or use other methods for collecting information (e.g., observation).

Q. The partners I work with range in size and structure. Some are very large and structured and some are small and informal. What do I do if a question doesn't apply to them for these reasons?

A. Because organizations may vary greatly in their size and structure, you may determine that some questions do not apply or will not yield a meaningful answer. First, determine if there is a way to reword a question to be more applicable and try it out. If a question simply will not work for a particular partner, you may choose not to ask it.

Q. What do I do if I do not think a partner is going to sustain GTO?

A. As a TAP, take some time to review your notes and experiences you've had with your partner. If it seems the partner does not have the capacity or the motivation to continue using GTO, you have a few options:

1. You can decide to continue to nurture their growth in this area. You'll need to determine, based on their responses to these questions, which aspects of GTO need the most attention and develop action steps accordingly.
2. You can decide to let them continue using (or not using) GTO as they have been. You'll need to decide if the status quo is sufficient to achieve outcomes and support them as necessary.
3. You may decide that their lack of commitment to an evidence-based approach is not appropriate to continue having a technical assistance relationship. Ending a relationship with a partner is a big decision, but sometimes it is necessary.

Q. What do I do with the information I get from asking these questions?

A. As a TA provider you may already have a way of documenting action steps for building your partner's capacity related to various skills. Sometimes these are called "TA Plans." As they respond to these questions, consider how your partner's responses reveal strengths and gaps. Use their responses to determine how you can fill in the gaps to help them continue using an evidence-based approach, such as GTO. And where they indicate strengths, determine how to leverage those strengths to build stronger programming.

Be sure to update your partner's TA plan regularly and indicate what steps they should take, as well as what you can do to help them build their capacity to deliver high-quality programming.

Section I: General Capacities

Instructions: Before an organization can sustain GTO, it needs to have some basic capacities to host the programming supported by GTO. Use these questions to assess the overall capacity of the partner organization, making note of areas of strength and areas where the partner might improve structure and/or operations.

Primary Questions	Further Exploration Questions
Staff Needs and Resources	
1. How well are the following organizational needs being met: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Sufficient technical or programmatic knowledge b. Ability to evaluate activities c. Adequate staff/human resources to accomplish tasks d. Able to manage fiscal activities 	i. Are there aspects of the organization's staffing or hiring processes that could be improved? What are they?
Working Environment	
2. How would you describe your organization's work culture? 3. How would you describe staff attitudes toward the organization? 4. Describe the overall working environment.	i. What are the general attitudes and expectations toward maintaining programs or system changes? ii. How is staff turnover managed? iii. How satisfied are staff with the working climate?
5. How often are new approaches and strategies introduced into the organization?	i. How open and willing are staff to adopt new approaches and strategies? ii. How hard do staff members work to sustain change?
6. How supportive is leadership of ongoing programs? 7. How well do leaders communicate support for ongoing programs? 8. How supportive is leadership of continuing new programs/ approaches/strategies?	<i>[Intentionally left blank.]</i>
Supportive Resources	
9. How likely are decision makers to allocate resources to new and innovative activities?	i. How would their approach impact the adoption and institutionalization of GTO?
10. How well do different departments in your organization (or project) support each other on a daily basis?	ii. How well does the division of labor across departments and staff ensure consistent quality of programming/services? iii. How stable is the organization on any given day?

Section II: Innovation-Specific Capacities

Instructions: To sustain using GTO, staff and leadership must feel comfortable using it and supported to do so. Use these questions to determine how well (and consistently) the partner organization supports innovative strategies. Highlight strengths and areas for improvement.

Primary Questions	Further Exploration Questions
Key Leaders	
1. Who are the champions of GTO within your organization? 2. How do they demonstrate their support?	i. Who should be included in planning for GTO sustainability?
3. What are the leadership's expectations for sustaining GTO?	ii. How do leaders provide feedback to staff? iii. How can leaders better communicate expectations and/or support for GTO?
System Support for Sustaining GTO	
4. How manageable does GTO seem to staff? 5. How efficient does the GTO process (and documentation) seem to staff? 6. What organizational processes currently exist that support continued use of GTO?	i. What can make GTO more manageable? ii. What could make GTO more efficient? iii. How has GTO been integrated into daily operations? a. <i>See follow-up questions in the Motivation Section under "Priority, Compatibility with Organization."</i>
7. How will staff be accountable for using the GTO steps?	iv. What systems are in place to sustain GTO? v. How is GTO usage and progress monitored currently? (e.g., checklists, plans) vi. How can front-line staff be encouraged to continue (or start) using GTO?
8. How do staff members currently ensure GTO is used with quality? (e.g., Quality Assurance/Quality Implementation [QA/QI])	vii. What resources will staff members have when they have questions (e.g., TA, training, GTO manuals, or other resources)?
Knowledge, Skills, Abilities	
9. How well do staff members understand GTO? 10. How skilled are staff in using GTO?	i. Which activities/steps do staff seem to understand the most? The least? ii. What is the system for addressing areas for improvement? a. If none, what system could be established?
Key Relationships	
11. What is the plan for an ongoing relationship with GTO experts or TAPs? 12. How do you plan to maintain ongoing relationships with other peer organizations using GTO?	<i>[Intentionally left blank.]</i>

Section III: Motivation

Instructions: Using GTO to plan, monitor, and evaluate programs requires more than knowledge, skills, and abilities (i.e., capacity). Motivation to use GTO is just as important. The reasons why a local provider chooses to, or not to, sustain GTO impacts how programming will continue.

As the TAP, you can build motivation by establishing support systems that inspire motivation. Partner responses to the following questions will help determine where and how you can build a partner's motivation to continue using GTO.

Primary Questions	Further Exploration Questions
Usefulness and Observation of Outcomes	
1. What value, if any, do staff see in continuing to use GTO?	<i>[Intentionally left blank.]</i>
2. What were the outcomes achieved on this project?	i. Have outcomes been communicated to staff, leadership, and stakeholders?
3. In what ways did GTO help your organization achieve your outcomes?	ii. Have outcomes been communicated by staff? By leadership? By stakeholders?
Compatibility with Partner Organization	
4. Is using GTO compatible with the organization's mission and values?	<i>[Intentionally left blank.]</i>
5. Is using GTO compatible with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Staff members' professional values? b. Leadership's professional values? 	
6. How does GTO fit with other policies and practices used within your organization?	i. Has GTO become a part of your regular work?
7. What is currently being done to make GTO a priority after this project/partnership ends?	ii. What steps are being integrated into daily tasks and operations to ensure that GTO is institutionalized after the project/partnership ends?
GTO as a Priority	
8. What are the competing priorities (i.e., ways of planning, implementing, and evaluating) that have a higher priority than GTO?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. What are the competing processes? ii. How have competing priorities been addressed in the past? iii. How will GTO be prioritized in the future?
9. Will your organization use GTO differently as the project moves toward sustainability?	iv. If yes, what are these changes/adaptations? What are the reasons for them?
10. What changes (e.g., adaptations, shortcuts, etc.) will be made to sustain this work?	v. If adaptations have already been made, has the staff tested them? What were the results?

Section IV: Future Plans and Ongoing Support

Instructions: Identifying action steps and persons responsible for those steps is critical for successfully sustaining GTO. Use the following questions to guide discussions about how GTO will be sustained and who will be involve

Future Plans and Ongoing Support	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Will the staff that used GTO during this project be the same staff continuing to use GTO going forward? 2. With which steps, if any, do these staff members have direct experience? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. How have the staff members been involved in each GTO step (e.g., development and use of tools, application of tools and processes, etc.)?
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. How comfortable are staff members using GTO (e.g., Does it feel complex and new? Has it become routine?)? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> ii. What support does your organization need to institutionalize GTO?
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. What type and level of technical assistance will be required as the TA relationship winds down? 	<p><i>[Intentionally left blank.]</i></p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. As staff transition, how will new staff be trained on GTO and oriented to the project? 8. How will new staff be trained and oriented in the future? 	<p><i>[Intentionally left blank.]</i></p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. How will staff continue using GTO moving forward? 10. What are the expectations for who will take on which tasks? 11. How will the process be managed? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. What are the expectations for front-line staff for using GTO (e.g., "just filling out paperwork")? ii. How have these expectations been communicated?

Readiness Assessment Notes Worksheet: Use this worksheet to take notes on your discussion(s) with your partner organization about their readiness to sustain the evidence-based approach GTO in their work. Make note of areas of strengths and weakness. When you review your notes and prepare action steps, take time to prioritize your findings based on the following:

Highlight: Areas of strength that can most readily be leveraged for future success and sustainability.

Circle: Areas of weakness that are most pressing to the sustainability of GTO and/or the project at large.

Number: Starting with 1, mark next to your notes the strengths and weakness that require the most immediate action. Use these numbers to prioritize you and your partner’s action steps moving forward.

You may print as many copies of this worksheet as you need to take notes.

Guide Section & Question #	Strengths	Weaknesses	General Notes

Guide Section & Question #	Strengths	Weaknesses	General Notes

Readiness Assessment Action Planning Worksheet. Use the following TA planning table to help plan, monitor, and evaluate support for readiness. Consider the priorities you identified in the Readiness Assessment Notes Worksheet to determine where you and your partner(s) should focus your efforts to sustain GTO. It may be helpful to ask, *“What would it take to support this organization in sustaining the application of evidence-based approaches? What steps can we take?”*

When planning your action steps, make sure to account for the timeline of your grant funding as well as steps that can and perhaps should be sustained after the grant cycle closes.

Area(s) of Focus	Goal/Objective:	Action Step:	Person Responsible	By When?
<input type="checkbox"/> General Capacity <input type="checkbox"/> Innovation-Specific Capacity <input type="checkbox"/> Motivation				
<input type="checkbox"/> General Capacity <input type="checkbox"/> Innovation-Specific Capacity <input type="checkbox"/> Motivation				
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GLOSSARY

Culture: Accepted or common way of thinking, behaving, or working within a place or organization.

Climate: The prevailing condition or mood within a group, place, or organization.

Evidence-Based Approach: A methodical way of planning, selecting, implementing, evaluating, and sustaining interventions and services using research and data to drive decision making.

Environment: The conditions around someone or something that influence its health, growth, or progress.

General Capacity: An organization's level of functioning related to its general structure and operation.

GTO®: *Getting to Outcomes®* is a "10-step process to help communities plan, implement, and evaluate the impact of their programs" ("Getting To Outcomes," n.d.) that attempts to promote positive social and behavioral outcomes.

Innovation: Program, practice, policy, or practice that is new to an organization.

Innovation-Specific Capacity: The knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to sustain an innovation—in this case GTO.

Motivation: The reasons a person would be inclined to or not inclined to use an innovation, approach, or product.

Proactive TA: Support, usually provided by a TAP, to plan for and anticipate needs, issues, and challenges in the planning and implementation of interventions and services.

Technical Assistance Provider (TAP): These are individuals who support an organization or program to deliver services and interventions using evidence-based approaches.

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