

Sustainability

Sustainability refers to the continuation of a project's goals, principles, and efforts to achieve desired outcomes. Often times, grantees, or subcontractors think sustainability means finding the resources to continue the project "as is" beyond the grant funding period. However, ensuring sustainability really means making sure that the goals of the project continue to be met through activities that are identified for sustainability.

For purposes of DDC work, sustainability is what happens to a program or intervention after external funding ends. It is the capacity to endure; development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs; equity over time, being fair and sensitive to future generations as we play out the present (NACDD Systems Change White Paper, 2011).

Sustainability for systemic change initiatives means that DD Councils strive to have the "concepts" they are working on to survive, to grow and flower, and to take on a life of their own - in some way, shape or form - that may or may not mean the specific project gets an infusion of funds to continue.

Sustainability is more than making sure that there is a funder after DD Council project funds are exhausted and it needs to be considered from the very outset of DD Council work.

A grant project is not going to sustain itself. Grantees and sub-contractors need to plan carefully and then systematically undertake the appropriate steps. Below are major steps a DD Council may want to include in a sub-award agreement related to the development of a sustainability plan:

- ✓ To the extent possible, base decisions on data. A good starting point is the regular performance reports for the project and grantee. An assessment of the project's current and past performance can allow the grantee to make informed decisions when planning sustainability.
- ✓ Identify who will be the focus of the sustained activities. For example, if the project demonstrated a new or improved way to deliver direct services to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families, include the target population in the plan. This will help determine additional project funding sources (if applicable).
- ✓ Develop a detailed description of what activities (or concepts) will be sustained. Questions that may be helpful include: What activities or concepts will be maintained? What activities or activities will change? Remember, not all activities or concepts must be sustained; just the ones that are intended to achieve the desired outcomes. Sometimes, new activities or concepts may be identified.
- ✓ Identify the management and operation resources that the organization will need to provide for the activities or concepts that were identified for sustainability.
- ✓ Disseminate sustainability planning activities to current and potential partners as well as other stakeholders. Include these activities in the planning and budget process.

- ✓ Locate champions. Champions would be organizations or interest groups that benefit from the activities or concepts and who are interested in the same target population.

Funding rules and considerations

It is important to remind grantees and subcontractors that expenditure of any grant funds on activities related to sustainability and sustainability planning should be consistent with the grantee's statement of work, and consistent with all rules and regulations that apply to the grant award. The DD Council staff should include information on expending grant funds on activities related to sustainability and sustainability planning in communications with the grantees. Grantees should be reminded that they must follow Federal rules and regulations on outreach, fund raising, lobbying, and all other relevant and applicable rules and regulations.

Sustainability Tips

Adapted from US Department of Labor

- Take sustainability seriously – don't make an assumption that because an idea is good, it will automatically attract future support. Sustainability must be planned.
- Set clear and realistic expectations – What activities (or concepts) will be sustained? What makes the most sense?
- Build capacity – consider whether or not the capacity of the grantee organization needs to be built in order to foster sustainability.
- Consider ways to institutionalize, or incorporate all or some part of the effort into existing, ongoing organizational or community operations, rather than continuing as a separate project.
- Collaborate with partners – on an ongoing basis. Make sure your partners realize the benefit of participating in your project. Keep partners up to date on how the project is doing and build a role for partners in developing and implementing a sustainability plan.
- Document and evaluate outputs and outcomes as marketing tools – Produce data and report that can be used as tools to explain the initiative's mission and successes. The report(s) can be used as outreach tools to garner further support. Don't wait until the end of the grant to get the word out about the successes of the project.
- Actively pursue the resources needed to ensure sustainability. Make sure specific staff members are tasked with pursuing needed resources (pay attention to funding rules and regulations). If needed, assemble a team to identify public or private resources that best align with the activities identified for sustainability, as well as any issues or challenges that may need to be addressed in order to successfully pursue the resources.

Sustainability planning process: Key Steps

- Clarify the vision
- Determine what will be sustained
- Build collaboration
- Choose designed sustainability strategies and methods
- Develop action steps for sustainability
- Document and communicate sustainability successes.

Six Strategies for Sustainability – Self-Assessment

Leadership:

- Has the leadership's vision for your project clarified which elements of your project are most important to sustain?
- Do you have an understanding of the role of a change agent?
- Do you have an understanding of how change happens in an organization/community?
- Have you included the goal of systemic change as you thought about what elements of your project you want to sustain?
- Do you know which decision-makers in your community should be involved as you decide which elements of the project you will sustain?
- Have you created a strategic plan to sustain various elements of your project?
- Have you considered some key aspects of your community—for example, the political context of the kind of work your program does and a map of its existing resources—as you have thought about what elements of your project you want to sustain?
- Do you have the tools/skills you need for strategic planning?
- Have you considered which policy-makers may be able to influence the sustainability of your program?
- Do you know how to determine policy-maker's priorities?
- Have you considered these policy-makers' priorities in sustaining your program?
- Have you created plans to communicate, involve and educate policymakers about your grant objectives in order to sustain the program?

Partnership and Collaboration:

- Have you considered how your strategic partners and collaborations might assist you in sustaining your project?
- Are there potential partners that you should consider as you think about sustaining your project?
- Have you considered what benefits your partners will accrue by remaining in the partnership as you sustain your project?

Implementation:

- Have you developed internal mechanisms and support (e.g. infrastructure; policies, or procedures) for your project either within its home organization or your partners that will help sustain it?
- Have you trained staff or partners to use skills that will achieve your program's intended outcomes?
- Have you thought how you should change your program to adapt to changing conditions in order to sustain it?

Communications/Marketing:

- Have you developed a clear, consistent message about the importance of your program's goals and its success in reaching them that will help sustain your program?
- Have you identified which audiences you need to reach to sustain your program?
- Have you considered what strategies you might use to market your project in order to sustain it?

Evaluation:

- Have you designed your evaluation with sustainability in mind?
- Have you considered how to best select and present your evaluation data to enhance sustainability efforts?
- Have you used your evaluation to make mid-course corrections to change the direction of the grant?

Financing:

- Have you considered fee or revenue development in increasing funds to sustain your project?
- Have you made contacts with businesses or foundations that can help you sustain your project?
- Have you considered leveraging existing resources to sustain your project?
- Have you sought out other community-based organizations with similar missions/visions in order to consolidate community's resources?
- Do you have an understanding of financial planning?