

SUSTAINABILITY

What is sustainability?

Sustainability refers to an idea or project that is duplicated, grown, or becomes part of a larger “system”. Sustainability does not necessarily mean that the entire project is replicated or continued. Sustainability can also be sustaining parts of the project. For example, a training curriculum, practice, website, or resource guide that was created as part of the project could be sustained.

A project that demonstrates success can more easily be replicated or expanded.

Systems Change and Sustainability

The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 Final Rule included the following definition:

The term “systemic change activities” means a sustainable, transferable, and replicable change in some aspect of service or support availability, design or delivery that promotes positive or meaningful outcomes for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families. ([45 CFR 1325.3](#))

Finding ways to sustain effective projects, or parts of projects allows a DD Council to use their resources for new systems change efforts.

To Sustain or Not to Sustain: Questions for the Council or subrecipient to consider...

- *Does the community (state or territory) need the program to continue?*
- *Do evaluation results demonstrate the program is making a positive difference in the lives of people with ID/DD and their families?*
- *Do people with ID/DD and their families value the program?*
- *Does the entire program need to be sustained?*
- *Can you identify what elements of the program are the most effective and needed?*
- *Can you identify other partners, agencies, or organizations with similar interests who may be interested in sustaining the program or parts of the program?*

(Adapted from Nonprofit Organization Sustainability, Emily Gantz McKay, November 2006.)

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Key Elements for Sustainability

There are three elements needed to plan for sustainability:

- **Relationships**
 - strong and effective collaboration among sub-grantee, DD Council, and other entities that are involved in the project.
- **Resources**
 - community, human, and financial.
- **Results**
 - successful outcomes for individuals with developmental disabilities, parents, and family members.

There are a variety of approaches to defining and understanding sustainability.

In some situations, it is simply continuing a program or service through funding or resource shifts. In others, it is about the continuation of activities and impact; creating a legacy, including continuing organizational ideals, principles, and beliefs; upholding existing relationships; and/or maintaining consistent outcomes.

Five Steps to Build a Sustainability Plan

1. Document the effectiveness of the program or activity as measured by specific outcomes.

- Key Questions:
 - What outcomes are collected to demonstrate success of the project or success of aspects of the project?
 - How do these outcomes compare to current practices?
 - How will you ensure it is effective for diverse individuals and their families?

2. Inventory Current Resources

- Key Questions:
 - What resources are in the community that align with your goals and outcomes?
 - Are there people involved that know about other resource sharing opportunities or even about other potential sources of funding?

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3. Focus on Priority Options/Focus for Future Funding

- Key Questions:
 - Who could benefit from this project?
 - What successes from the project could be integrated into the current system(s) to improve outcomes for people with I/DD and their families?

4. Assess Sustainability of Projects and Resource Options

- Key Questions:
 - How many people could benefit from what is provided by this project?
 - What parts of the project have the most support?
 - How can the successes of the project leverage change in the system to ultimately improve the lives of people with I/DD and their families?

5. Institutionalize Changes Through Documentation, Dissemination, and Leadership

- Key Questions:
 - Are the people affected by the change included in the discussion on determining effectiveness?
 - Who benefits the most if these new and more effective practices become part of the system (systems change)?
 - What specific practice, paperwork, staffing, and other changes are needed to sustain this project?
 - Who might resist these changes? Why?

Sustaining Improved Outcomes: Increasing Your Odds for Success – 3 things

1. Sustainability is not likely to happen without data on effectiveness.

- a. It is recommended data collection start at the beginning of a project since final-year data may prove difficult to analyze. This is important when documenting baseline outcomes to which the project outcomes can be compared.

2. Identifying potential resources to sustain and expand the scale of a project takes time.

Enlisting partners at new levels of resource and data sharing also takes time.

- a. An early start to discussions on needed resources—and why they are justified based on partners' needs—can establish buy-in from partners at the onset.

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3. **Recruiting support from the community, families, and key leaders in elected positions (who may have a personal stake in the project's goals) takes time.**
 - a. Start early to recruit, engage, and prepare allies to make the case for sustaining the project.

Additional Resources:

[Sustainability Toolkit: \(hhs.gov\)](#)

This resource provides a Sustainability Planning Matrix Tool that could be adapted to your needs. Please see Appendix A, pages 20-26 for this tool.

[Toolkits | Community Tool Box \(ku.edu\)](#)

This Toolkit has information on sustainability with examples.

[HHPGM_FINAL_CH7.PDF \(hud.gov\)](#)

This resource includes information on system level sustainability - public policy.

[Resource Guide for Building Sustainable Programs \(Revised 2019\) \(hhs.gov\)](#)

This resource includes factors for program sustainability and a framework of “seeds for success”.

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