

# SUSTAINABILITY

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## 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.)

*This information is intended for Council staff. Reading ease level: 10.3*

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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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