



Beyond the Finish Line: Tips for Sustaining Your Project

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Sustainability is a vital aspect of adolescent pregnancy prevention (APP) projects. It is important to consider sustainability throughout all stages of project development, implementation, and evaluation. This tip sheet provides information on the elements of sustainability as well as concrete strategies to consider for increasing the life of APP projects.

WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY?

The literature on sustainability is expansive and offers definitions as diverse as the array of APP projects and their various implementing structures. Some definitions of sustainability include the following:

- the capacity of an organization to achieve long-term success and stability and to serve its clients and consumers without the threat of losing financial support or quality of services (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, n.d.);
- the ability to continue services after a funding period is over and to ensure that the organization becomes a permanent part of community resources (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 2008); and
- the institutionalization of a project as an integral part of an organization (Goodman et al., 1993).

Numerous publications offer extensive guidance related to project sustainability. Most address two key principles: (1) know what it is you want or need to sustain (i.e., the goal of the sustainability effort), and (2) know what is needed to accomplish that sustainability (i.e., the sustainability plan).

Sustainability goals vary across grantees depending on timeline, context, and support. During a recent in-person event, FYSB TPP grantees shared sustainability goals, including some grantees focused on institutionalizing APP projects in schools and community-based organizations, and others focused on continuing to implement APP projects within their current structure.

FYSB APP grantees cited the following examples as necessary for sustainability:

- political support (e.g., Tribal council, school board, governor);
- an established training infrastructure with trained effective facilitators;
- diversified funding;
- community involvement and support;
- youth involvement; and
- program fidelity and outcome evaluation.

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF SUSTAINABILITY

The Finance Project, a nonprofit agency that helps organizations develop strategies to sustain their projects, published a conceptual framework with eight elements of sustainability that incorporates comprehensive principles and strategies used by successfully sustained projects. The developers emphasize that the framework applies to any initiative regardless of its programmatic focus. Not all elements need the same amount of attention: what receives more consideration will depend on the needs of individual initiatives and their communities at a given time (Hayes, 2002). Sustainability planning should be part of the implementation process from beginning. Thus, many of the following strategies and tips for sustainability also apply to effective program planning and implementation. Other helpful sustainability resources from this organization can be found at: http://www.financeproject.org/all_pubs.cfm?cat=6&p=1

ADAPTATION OF THE FINANCE PROJECT FRAMEWORK FOR TPP PROJECTS

Elements	Strategies and Other Tips
<p>Vision: Have a clear and articulated vision of what the TPP project aims to achieve and sustain.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the needs of the community and how the sustained programming will continue to respond to those needs. • Articulate the project’s unique niche in the community and how it helps achieve the mission of its organization. • Use input from a broad range of stakeholders to define the project’s vision and what needs to be sustained. • Implement a marketing plan with messages tailored for different audiences to communicate the vision clearly and widely in the community. • Invite community members and other stakeholders to open-house events.
<p>Results orientation: Demonstrate the success of the TPP project through measurable results.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use easy-to-understand indicators to assess progress toward meeting project goals. • Establish sustainable data collection methods and systems to continually track progress. • Work with stakeholders to examine results and determine ways to improve the TPP project. • Disseminate results in engaging ways to share project success, elicit support, and ensure that the benefits of the project are readily perceived. • Use results to apply for additional funding.
<p>Strategic financing orientation: Know what resources are needed to sustain the TPP project, how to access these resources, and how to combine them to achieve project goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider future funding needs long before existing funds diminish and be aware of the specific costs of delivering the TPP project. • Prepare an engaging and memorable 30-second pitch to share on a moment’s notice. • Seek to diversify the financial portfolio as much as possible and give special consideration to different funding sources for varying types of project activities. • Be creative in accessing and using in-kind resources (e.g., space, training, marketing, supplies). • Forge strategic and mutually beneficial partnerships to leverage resources. • Remember that federal grant funds cannot be used to supplant or replace current public or private funding. Time spent seeking funding for a TPP project must be covered under a different funding source.
<p>Adaptability to changing conditions: Strategically respond to new opportunities or threats that influence the TPP project.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay attuned to changing economic, social, educational, political, and demographic conditions at the local, state, and national levels. • Educate others about policies that support the TPP project’s vision. • Foster partnerships with other organizations that are knowledgeable about policy change. • Once a policy change is confirmed, do not wait for the new policy to be put in place before making necessary adjustments to the TPP project. • Continue to market the benefits of the TPP project in light of changing conditions.
<p>Broad base of community support: Build and maintain diverse and supportive stakeholder groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to involve local leaders from business, government, faith-based organizations, nonprofits, and others throughout the life of the TPP project. • Form partnerships with organizations that serve the same population, be clear on new roles and responsibilities, and establish or revise memoranda of understanding, if appropriate. • Build positive relationships with local media. • Include the youth and families you serve in project planning. • Develop the leadership skills of key stakeholders so they can educate others about the project.
<p>Key champions: Enlist the support of persuasive voices in the community who are committed to the TPP vision and willing to use their influence to sustain your project.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research the backgrounds of potential champions to determine the best fit for the TPP project with the intent of finding a common purpose. • Develop an outreach plan to recruit key champions and to maintain existing relationships. • Recognize that the favorable visibility of having champions can be just as important as the funding they might contribute. • Publicly recognize champions and other key stakeholders for their contributions.

Elements (cont.)	Strategies and Other Tips (cont.)
<p>Strong internal systems: Maintain effective and efficient internal capacity to develop, deliver, and evaluate the TPP project (e.g., personnel, management, accounting, and information systems).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct an assessment that determines organizational strengths and weaknesses for sustaining efforts. Consider using a resource such as the <i>Program Sustainability Assessment Tool</i> found at https://sustaintool.org or the <i>Network for Healthy California Sustainability Assessment Tool and Companion Guide</i> found at http://www.civicpartnerships.org/docs/services/NHC-Sustainability.htm. • Foster leadership and support at all levels of the TPP project (management, staff, and board or advisors). • Continually invest in professional development to hone skills and stay abreast of best practices. • Continue to refine and use original planning documents (e.g., strategic plans, logic models). • Establish internal capacity to implement activities that once required external support, such as forming a cadre of curriculum trainers.
<p>Sustainability plan: Articulate a long-term plan that brings together the previous seven elements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As early as possible in the life of the project, develop a written sustainability plan, including determining which aspects of the project are essential to sustain. Example templates and plans include the <i>Sustainability Action Plan Template 1 and Template 2</i> found at http://cphss.wustl.edu/Projects/Pages/Sustainability-Framework-and-Assessment-Tool.aspx and <i>A Sustainability Planning Guide for Healthy Communities</i> found at http://www.cdc.gov/healthycommunitiesprogram/pdf/sustainability_guide.pdf. • Involve key stakeholders, including current funders, in sustainability planning. • Use the sustainability plan continually and revise as needed. • Ensure that the plan aligns with other planning tools (e.g., evaluation plans).

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