



Developing Effective Sustainable Personal Responsibility Education Programs

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WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY?

Sustainability can have multiple definitions when used in different contexts. Sustainability can be the continued use of program components and activities for the ongoing achievement of desirable program and population outcomes (Schierer & Dearing, 2011). A program can also be considered sustainable if core elements were maintained (e.g., remained recognizable or delivered at a sufficient level of fidelity or intensity to yield the desired health outcomes) after the initial implementation support had been withdrawn and if adequate capacity for the continuation of these elements was also maintained (Stirman, et al., 2012). Nevertheless, sustainability can be achieved when partnerships and resources are strategically leveraged and it is approached as the overall process of developing an effective program.

DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT SUSTAINABLE PROGRAMS

The following factors for program sustainability, adapted from the Office of Adolescent Health (OAH, 2017), provide a foundation from which sustainable Personal Responsibility Education Programs (PREP) can be built:

Factors for Program Sustainability	Seeds to Success
 <p>Strategize</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start planning early • Create a shared vision with partners and community leaders • Define sustainability for your program • Incorporate sustainability activities into daily program operations • Create a sustainability plan • Incorporate measures of success into the sustainability plan



Assess

- Assess the internal and external environments
- Consider the organizational, financial, and policy environments at the local, state, and national levels
- Embed continuous assessments throughout the life of the program or service
- Use the information to decide what should be sustained



Lead

- Identify strong internal leaders
- Keep organizational and senior leaders engaged through strategic updates
- Identify community champions
- Promote leadership development and shared leadership opportunities



Evolve

- Match services to community needs and reframe work to new priorities
- Plan in advance for staff and leadership changes
- Be innovative and find new opportunities; be prepared when they come
- Speak with others (internal or external) to learn about trends



Communicate

- Formulate a communication approach and message
- Collect and share stories regularly
- Promote the program and its services
- Create an online presence
- Encourage program leaders, strategic partners, and community champions to share



Integrate

- Determine which program components could be integrated into other settings
- Streamline service delivery, policies, and practices
- Integrate programs, services, and practices into the broader community



Partner

- Develop strategic partnerships
- Assess existing partnerships continuously
- Establish a shared vision and commitment to sustainability
- Engage partners to help market program successes
- Leverage partner resources



Diversify

- Review the program budget to identify core activities and services
- Identify and pursue funding opportunities
- Create a sustainability planning budgetary line item
- Determine what program components could become fee-for-service
- Build fundraising and grant-writing capacity

COMMON CHALLENGES TO SUSTAINABILITY

Achieving sustainability can be challenging and complex. Programs can be affected by multiple influences, both internally and externally. However, failing to address these challenges can lead to missed opportunities

that could have resulted in improvements in adolescent health and well-being (Walugembe et al., 2019). Some common challenges to sustaining programs include the following:

- Delayed advance planning to secure necessary resources;
- Lack of well-documented successes to share with the community and funders, despite the quality of programming;
- Lack of stakeholder ownership of the programming;
- Finite funding streams and competition with organizations doing similar work; and
- Difficulty building partners' capacity because the implementation setting or staff turnover (Healthy Teen Network, 2013).

Overcoming these challenges requires innovative strategies that will demonstrate the value of your programs to your constituents and make it appealing to your funders. For example, some strategies for PREP grantees may include the following:

- Exploring new funding streams. These might include organizations or foundations that have not previously provided your program with funding. It could also be braided funding in which an organization receives limited funding from multiple sources that together is enough to continue the program;
- Exploring ways to ensure there is training and capacity building for program implementation included in current programmatic activities;
- Working with new partners or different kinds of partners. They might provide a new setting where you might be able to implement your program or may be able to handle packaging and scaling of curriculum;
- Prioritizing sustainability by creating a time and space for the work;
- Finding funding for other components of the program, such as adulthood preparation subjects;
- Expanding to new populations, possibly even at locations where funding is available for programming;
- Examining organizational staffing for sustainability;
- Establishing various approaches to framing your PREP work for different funding opportunities while maintaining core program elements; and

Creating a Sustainability Plan

A sustainability plan enables programs to have a concrete road map for continuing programs beyond the cycle of available federal funding. Written plans should be developed as early in the life of a program as possible. Steps to create a sustainability plan are listed below.

1. Assemble the planning team
2. Involve key stakeholders, including current funders, in sustainability planning
3. Review your program's mission and purpose
4. Review your [Program Sustainability Assessment Tool](#) results
5. Determine which aspects of the program are essential to retain
6. Prioritize which areas are to be addressed first
7. Write the action plan with specific steps that include [SMART objectives](#), how you will achieve the objectives, who is responsible for doing the work, what the metrics for achievement are, resources needed, and the due date
8. Implement the plan
9. Revisit and revise as needed

- Expanding funding opportunity searches to include streams that address primary contributing risk and protective factors for adolescent pregnancy.

RESOURCES

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