

This article highlights the steps necessary to creating a sustainability plan when planning a project and/or applying for a grant.

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Forming a Project Sustainability Plan

A process that is tied to funding and program long-term program success

Sustainability planning is a process that should begin during the early stages of project planning, and not when you have to write a paragraph on it for a grant application. The strongest plans address multiple aspects of sustainability and provide guidance over time. An effective sustainability plan can actually help an organization obtain investors and gain community support.

Step One – The Planning Committee

Begin your sustainability planning process by recruiting a planning committee, including individuals from within your organization, members of the community, and people who will be served by your project. Make sure that all members of your committee are willing to commit to the time needed to develop a sustainability plan.

Step Two – Creating a Vision and Realistic Goals

Once your planning committee is in place, start by reviewing what has already been done, and identify strengths and weaknesses of the project. Create a vision and goals, and decide how you will measure outcomes. Determine who is affected by your project outcomes. Organizations often are not realistic in their goals, activities, and outcomes. The danger in setting unrealistic expectations in order to obtain funding is that your project will be difficult, if not impossible, to sustain.

Next Steps – Taking Actions to Support Program Sustainability

With the committee formed and the goals laid out, the next series of steps involves taking actions to support your project's sustainability:

- Identify current resources and gaps.
- Determine additional human and financial resources needed to implement and sustain your goals.
- Think about resources and expertise that can be shared, and then develop and prioritize strategies to obtain those resources.
- Anticipating changes and adapting to them are keys to long-term sustainability; discuss potential changes in your community and population served that may change the scope or services of your project.
- Identify a core and broad base of community supporters and key champions. Clearly define how the project benefits each supporter and champion. Find a supporter who can help your organization develop a marketing plan to build community awareness and support.

- Make sure that key stakeholders are willing to adopt the proposed sustainability plan. Once all of these points are settled, you'll have a plan you can now use to drive implementation—and sustainability.

The planning committee should also consider and communicate to all stakeholders that there may be a need to transition from one research-based method or practice to another over time, in order to adapt as student outcomes and changing needs of the community.

Source: Keeping Your Program Growing After the Money Runs Out; T.H.E. Journal, December 1, 2005; Sheila Fernley