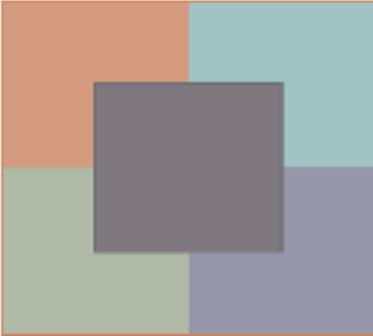


Sustainability for Publicly-Funded Behavioral Health and Justice Grant Programs: A Model for Stability and Success

Pre-Publication Edition



Published by SAMHSA's GAINS Center for Behavioral Health and Justice Transformation

Jac Charlier, MPA
Maureen McDonnell, BA
Center for Health and Justice

Sustainability for Publicly-Funded Behavioral Health and Justice Grant Programs: A Model for Stability and Success

December 2012



SAMHSA's GAINS Center for Behavioral Health and Justice Transformation
Policy Research Associates
345 Delaware Avenue
Delmar, NY 12054
<http://www.prainc.com>



Center for Health and Justice
TASC, Inc.
1500 N. Halsted
Chicago, IL 60642
<http://www.centerforhealthandjustice.org>



This work was conducted by SAMHSA's GAINS Center for Behavioral Health and Justice Transformation, operated by Policy Research Associates, Inc., in collaboration with Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities's Center for Health and Justice, and was authored by Jac Charlier and Maureen McDonnell. Support for this work came from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS). The material contained in this publication does not necessarily represent the position of the SAMHSA Center for Mental Health Services.

The suggested citation for this resource is Charlier J., & McDonnell, M. (2012). *Sustainability for publicly-funded behavioral health and justice grant programs: A model for stability and success*. Delmar, NY: SAMHSA's GAINS Center for Behavioral Health and Justice Transformation.

GOALS OF THIS DOCUMENT

Reinforce the need for intentional planning for sustainability early in the life cycle of a program

Present “conceptual sustainability” as distinct from, but as critical as, “practical sustainability”

Offer practical steps and questions to consider in planning for sustainability

Describe the nature and value of both direct and indirect partnerships

Federally funded grant programs serve an important role as incubators for new partnerships and as platforms for the expansion and integration of evidence-based practices for serving complex populations.

A significant effort is invested by program partners into developing the grant application, securing stakeholder participation, forming oversight committees, integrating evidence-based practices, hiring staff, and initiating program outreach and services. The early stages of planning and implementation may take months, if not years.

While program partners are typically requested to discuss plans for sustainability on the initial grant application, long-term sustainability is rarely broached until many years into the program, once the partnerships have been forged, the program design implemented, and services delivered. At that stage, program partners largely consider the prospect and ramifications of funding termination and strategize ways to replace that funding.

This strictly financial perspective on sustainability misses a critical opportunity to leverage the energy, momentum, and sentiment that led to the initial application, policy and practice changes that may have resulted from the program, and the value of the services now anchored in communities. A belated effort may not leave sufficient time to execute a plan toward achieving sustainability.

An early and consistent focus on sustainability can improve the prospects of long-term stability with the added benefit of keeping the goals and value of the program at the forefront of strategic thinking.

KNOW, DO, BE

Sustainability should be integrated into every aspect of program development and implementation. Partners must first **know** what is needed for sustainability: what partners, resources, and infrastructure need to be in place. As part of the planning process, partners should move early to **do** things that promote sustainability, aligning those partners and resources and determining how to build that infrastructure. Finally, as the program emerges and evolves, partners should aim to **be** sustainable, continuously looking for opportunities and partnerships that can support the program into the future.

CONCEPTUAL SUSTAINABILITY

Conceptual sustainability is reinforcing the *value* of the program to the individuals, institutions, and systems that can help the program achieve sustainability. Articulating that value will be as varied as the audiences to which the message is presented. Some audiences may be moved by the **focus** of the program and its perceived value. Examples are serving vulnerable populations like children, restoring families, or offering people in recovery chances at stability. Other audiences may be engaged in the practical realities of the program, such as reduced crime, cost savings, or increased productivity.

Program partners must cultivate both the conceptual and practical over time. They must continue to communicate that the conceptual value is being realized and that the practical benefits are being achieved. Both require time to come to fruition, and program leadership should identify opportunities to articulate the conceptual benefits as practical milestones are achieved throughout the program's evolution, through reports, press releases, and other means.

Likewise, program leadership can support sustainability by focusing on external presentations of the idea and vision, while a planning team focuses on the practical development of program operations. External focus and articulation of the long-term vision can and should start early and be maintained throughout the program's life cycle.

PRACTICAL STEPS

While sustainability is about the future, it must be prepared for in advance. Sustainability is built slowly and cannot be achieved with a reactive position. Programs can take several practical steps to build this foundation:

- Start as early as possible in the program to think about, plan for, and support sustainability.
- Ensure your vision has meaning by tying benefits to public sentiment or policy priorities. For example, do you serve a population that has emotional resonance, such as veterans or children? What is the program's impact on public health, safety, or investment? Does your program reflect community attitudes?
- Clearly define your conceptual value. Closely tied to your vision, this step involves being able to succinctly articulate the need for your program, its benefit, and the goal you're working toward.
- Activate your story by involving consumers, peers, and family members. Involve them in the planning process, but also in conversations with stakeholders, policymakers, and the general public. Add the human dimension to your program.
- Leverage opportunities and relationships by engaging with other programs, groups, or activities whose scope overlaps that of the program.
- Take advantage of new technologies like social media and online video to reinforce the progress and value of your program.
- As a corollary to several of these points, be prepared to seize upon events that offer opportunities for you to cast your vision far and wide. For example, recently there was a story about a survivor of human trafficking who had just started a bakery. With the permission of this new business owner, a local anti-human trafficking organization could work collaboratively to help the business and reach customers about trafficking.

- As conceptual sustainability is about appealing to the heart, consider the role that can be played by social enterprises. People do give dollars to certain groups for products and services they can actually get elsewhere, maybe even at a lower cost. Could your program start a social enterprise?

Some questions to consider throughout the length of your program that will support all of the above steps include:

- Do the vision, mission, and values carry weight now in your public square?
- Will the vision be relevant going forward?
- Who benefits from this project?
 - In what way?
- How much? Can it be quantified?
 - Money saved
 - Quality of life improved
 - Public safety improved
- What information do you have?
- What data can you develop easily?
- How can you present your data in a manner that is clear and easily understood?
- What client successes can you share?
- What venues exist to discuss your program?
- What is compelling about your program that will make people support it?

PRACTICAL SUSTAINABILITY – BUILT ON PARTNERSHIPS

A solid foundation of partnerships and collaboration is critical to the long-term success of your program. The more partnerships that are formed, the more resources will be available, the more opportunities will present themselves, and the more big-picture thinking can occur.

Much of the alignment of partners occurs during the grant application process, but partnerships should also be formed over the course of the project. These partnerships can be understood in two ways.

- **Direct Partnerships**

Direct partners are organizations that can provide services; personnel; access to funding; or can assist with legislative, administrative, or policy changes. These partners may include state agencies, community providers and practitioners, and local and state legislative leaders.

A key role of direct partners is the identification and pursuit of additional funding sources or strategies against the time when the original source of funding is no longer available. The limited availability of public resources and the time required to investigate, pursue, and receive public funds demands that this process begin early and aggressively. As partners come to the table, their knowledge of both private and public funding sources is critical to identifying new opportunities. It is important for programs to be flexible and creative in this process. Partnerships necessarily require compromise and common ground, and funding streams vary in terms of requirements and expectations.

Direct partners are also central to identifying policy and practice changes that could support long-term sustainability. For example, if your program relies on a new application of a best practice, is there a way to offer training on that best practice across systems? Is there a statute or regulation that could be amended to reflect evolving attitudes and the nuances of the population you serve? Is there “low-hanging fruit” in terms of public resources that could be adapted to help support your program (e.g., an existing court call that could be expanded)?

- **Indirect Partnerships**

Indirect partners are organizations that can connect you to additional direct partners and offer a broader platform for articulating the value and vision of your program. These partners may include provider associations, community development and advocacy groups, media outlets, and community leaders.

Indirect partnerships help to identify and engage champions and advocates who can speak to the value of your program. They may also provide opportunities for you to discuss your program with audiences and in venues you may otherwise not have access to, including association conferences, continuing education training opportunities, and community town hall events.

CONCLUSION

Sustainability is an intentional process that begins early in a program’s life cycle with a constant eye toward the future. At its core, sustainability is about aligning resources – people, services, partners, institutions, and funding – that will allow program leadership to take the cause and vision of the program to their constituencies, advocating for its value. Sustainability requires an awareness of the political and public landscape and the ability to articulate the need for the program within that landscape. Planning for sustainability is highly strategic and critical to the evolution of your program.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Jac A. Charlier, M.P.A.
Director, Consulting and Training
Center for Health and Justice
Chicago, IL
Jcharlier@tasc-il.org
312-573-8302

Maureen McDonnell
Director, Health Care Policy
Center for Health and Justice
Chicago, IL
Mmcdonnell@tasc-il.org
312-573-8322