

Building a Strong Foundation for Sustainability

Handout 8 - Documenting Your Sustainability Strategies/Developing a Plan

Developing a Planning Committee

A key activity when planning for the long-term sustainability of your coalition or community health initiative is forming a sustainability planning committee. The sustainability planning committee should be responsible for discussing relevant issues, making decisions, and, ultimately, for implementing the sustainability plan.

The planning committee should be made up of a variety of members including coalition and/or partnership representatives, outside decision makers who have an interest in developing sustainability strategies. It is very important for people that are recruited for this task to enjoy planning work, to be positive, and like-minded with regard to the need for sustainability.

Consider including:

Coalition and/or Partnership Representatives

- Executive or steering committee members
- Coalition coordinators and project managers
- Staff and volunteers

External Representatives – Also consider inviting (or soliciting input from) key external representatives.

This may include representatives from:

- Community governance organizations (e.g., from city hall or the local transportation authority)
- Businesses or corporations
- Nonprofit organizations, hospitals, or foundations
- Other groups (e.g., faith-based, recreation, neighborhood homeowner associations)
- Local, regional, and state policymakers, local-level stakeholders and leaders
- Volunteers from the community who may be well-trained or influential

Committee members will help decide:

- What kind of collaborative organization or infrastructure is needed
- What governance structure will be required?
- What current organizations, coalitions, partnerships and other groups should oversee and participate in the new collaborative community health effort
- How these groups can be leveraged to ensure the ongoing sustainability of your community health efforts

Individuals selected to serve on the sustainability planning committee should be engaged and committed to sustainability goals. They also should be comfortable with the idea that sustainability planning may be a long-term process. Remember to maintain ongoing communication with coalition and/or partnership members outside the sustainability

planning committee to keep them informed and engaged, appropriate to their position and level of interest. This can be key to developing long-term support for your efforts. Create a shared vision and mission.

Consider identifying people /resources to assume the following roles:

- **Coordinator/Project Planner:** The process coordinator or project planner helps to ensure that the sustainability planning timeline is appropriate and realistic, appropriate people are involved and engaged in the process, meetings occur as planned, internal and external communications are effective, and action steps are implemented.
- **Facilitator:** Consider whether an outside facilitator might be available on a volunteer or paid basis. If financially feasible, you may want to consider contracting an outside person to help facilitate discussions and decision-making for the planning meetings. Ending or de-prioritizing an activity can be difficult, especially if people are passionate about it. Participants can become very passionate about a particular point of view, so it is important to have a consensus-building process that can make the most of participants' input but can still make headway with decisions.

a. Timetable for Plan Development

With any planning effort, thinking through the details of the process before you begin is important. In addition to deciding who will work on the plan, consider how long the planning process will take. Depending on the community context and the extent of community integration, the plan can take anywhere from a few months to one year to complete. However, once a strong organizational foundation has been set, subsequent planning efforts should proceed quickly.

It is a good idea to start the sustainability planning process as early in the life of your community health initiative as possible. Identifying and agreeing on a process and including a timetable are very important. When developing your timeline, consider the size and technological capacity (e.g., e-mail, Web access, use of social media) of your group. Decide when in-person meetings are essential and when virtual meetings can be used instead.

b. Writing a Plan

Sustainability plans should be tailored to the realities of the coalition, partners or community involved. You may also want to develop two types of plans. One would be a more detailed internal action plan for achieving your sustainability objectives. Another could be more of an executive summary which could be used to inform external stakeholders; such as: the media, funders, and decision-makers about your sustainability efforts.

Sample Sustainability Plan Outline

1. **An Executive Summary** – An executive summary provides:
 - The background and history for the initiative
 - An explanation of what sustainability means, and the importance of implementing sustainability strategies for effectively and efficiently addressing current and future public health challenges
 - The goals as well as the needs and the costs for achieving the goals
 - Clearly defined outcomes for the effort
2. **Credits** – The credits section of the plan includes:
 - The organizations or individuals who contributed to the plan's development
3. **Situational Analysis** – The situational analysis section provides information about:
 - Community and environmental opportunities and challenges, such as community needs assessments, resource opportunities, and so forth
 - Existing partner strengths and limitations
4. **Sustainability Planning Goal(s) and Objectives** – This section of the plan includes:
 - Clearly defined planning goals and measurable objectives for the long-term continuation of the effort
5. **Sustainability Strategies** – This section of the plan:
 - Identifies and describes organizational or structural changes
 - Acknowledges the coalition members and/or partners in the planning process
 - Defines marketing and public relations objectives
 - Describes financial and resource development objectives
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6. **An Implementation Plan** – This section describes how the plan will be put into action. To be effective, the planning committee should do the following:
 - Develop strategies for organizational and resource efforts
 - Develop an action plan and a timetable for implementation of identified strategies
 - Identify who is responsible for the tasks and major outcomes (which have been defined) for the effort
7. **Evaluation and Feedback Strategies** – It is important to decide early on how you will monitor and evaluate the success of the effort. This includes:
 - Implementing strong evaluation strategies and feedback loops
 - Identifying how you'll evaluate and document success of the planning process
 - Showing how the new infrastructure supports this success
 - Identifying strategies to strengthen partnerships and implement agreements that foster clear partnership roles and continue to improve the infrastructure