

# Sustainability Planning Tips

Organizations often wish to sustain interventions they have found to be beneficial. Planning for sustainment is a key component of program planning and implementation. This is particularly true of interventions that are initiated via grant funding. Sustainability planning is most effective when it begins early, includes key partners, and addresses each of the following six questions in this worksheet:

1. What do you wish to sustain?
2. Why do you wish to sustain it (what are the benefits, and what evidence is there that it works)?
3. What would it take to sustain it (changes required, cost, potential funding sources, etc.)?
4. Who can help?
5. If there are components that will not be sustained, how will you manage the transition?
6. How can effective dissemination and communication help you achieve your sustainment goals (see [Effective Dissemination Worksheet for Children's Bureau Discretionary Grant Planning](#))?

The following are common sustainability planning mistakes:

1. Sustainability planning is often an afterthought and begins too late. It should be a key component throughout the planning and implementation process.
2. Sustainability planning often fails to include key stakeholders who will be vital to the successful sustainment of the intervention.
3. Sustainability planning often starts with the question "how will we pay for it?" without first answering key questions about what to sustain and why it should be sustained.

The following are three key components to successful sustainability planning:

1. Start early and revisit and update the sustainability plan on a regular basis.
2. Form a sustainability planning team made up of all key stakeholders.
3. Start with the first two questions in the sustainability planning worksheet—what do we want to sustain and why do we want to sustain it?—Do not move on to the other four questions in the planning worksheet until your planning team has very solid answers to the questions "what?" and "why?".

Sustainability Planning Worksheet (see fillable Word format version on the [Sustainability Planning Worksheet webpage](#))

This tool was developed to help Children's Bureau (CB) discretionary grantees with their sustainability planning.

- Since 2012, six federal project officers (FPOs) have used this tool to support 10 grant clusters (approximately 75 grantees), and some FPOs and grantees have used it multiple times.
- CB grantees are introduced to the tool during grantee meetings and webinars. They began filling in the blanks during their kickoff meeting. They are asked to take their draft sustainability plan back home to share with their partner organizations, to begin a strategic sustainability planning process, and to continue meeting with partner organizations on a regular basis to update and implement the plan.
- There is a significant amount of anecdotal evidence that shows this sustainability planning tool works well. Grantees are very willing to use it and say they find it helpful. Many FPOs are repeat users.

The following are tips for using the sustainability planning worksheet:

1. Assemble your sustainability planning team. Ask who else should be included and set up a schedule for developing, revising, and implementing your sustainability plan.
2. Brainstorm.
  - Why did you start this intervention in the first place? What were the unmet needs or problems? What were you hoping to accomplish? Change? Improve?
  - Have the needs been met? Have the problems been solved? Has the mission been accomplished?
  - If your intervention is not sustained, will the need/problem return?
  - Has the need been met for everyone, everywhere? Or just for some of the people in your jurisdiction? How about the rest of your state/region/country?
  - What part of “meeting the need” is within your sphere of control? Sphere of influence?
  - What is your vision? In the initial stage of sustainability planning, set aside constraints for the moment and imagine, ideally, what you would like to sustain.
3. Start filling in the sustainability planning worksheet.
  - It works best to do this on a computer (where the cells can expand to hold all of your input) rather than on a hard copy. An electronic version of the planning worksheet is available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/cbdg-toolkit-sustainability-planning-worksheet>.
  - Draft answers to the first two worksheet questions (what should be sustained and why?) before trying to answer the other four questions.
  - Early in the planning process, the activities you list in the “next steps” column will probably focus on getting more information to help you fine tune your answers to the first two questions in your sustainability plan.
  - Later on in the process, your “next steps” will begin to focus on implementing your sustainability plan.
4. Meet with your sustainability team on a regular basis.
  - Review progress on accomplishing the “next steps” for developing and implementing your sustainability plan.
  - Revise and update your sustainability plan.
  - Agree on next steps, timeline, and assignments for completing and implementing your sustainability plan.



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Administration for Children and Families  
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