

Sustaining the Capacity for Change

A lot has changed for community-based organizations in the last 20 years. The needs seem greater and the resources tighter. Following established patterns, we tend to assume that programs achieving results continue to be funded. Why? Because positive change is evident. But that is not always the case. Many dedicated community-based organizations focus their full attentions on their clients and services and leave the issue of program sustainability until the last year expecting positive results to speak for themselves.

Most funding organizations facing financial constraints themselves are looking to foster self-reliance among those they fund. They may look to see that the organizations they fund are attracting resources from other sources, or are generating revenue or in kind contributions from their own activities. They often ask for a sustainability plan as a condition for funding.

Managing for Change encourages organizations to plan for sustainability from the outset. There are six key steps in managing for sustainability:

1. Facilitate planning for sustainability during the strategy development phase

It is useful at this stage to include staff members responsible for needs assessment and monitoring or the evaluator in the program planning. They can provide information about the assessed needs and support the development of 'the theory of change'. At this stage, it is useful to consider:

- whether the initiative needs to be sustained and for how long
- how long the initiative needs to be in place in order to achieve its results (e.g., 1 year; 10 years).
- whether the effort or initiative should have a planned end date (e.g., a one time clean up of a local park) or be ongoing (e.g. providing adult literacy classes for new generations of community members)
- whether there is sufficient support in the community to maintain the initiative (or if there likely will be)
- probable or potential obstacles to sustainability (e.g., how current or future political and social attitudes might affect resource availability?)
 - goals and context for sustaining the effort:

2. Track progress on an ongoing basis, providing information to funders and other decision-makers

Sharing the information collected through monitoring with funders and other community decision-makers, helps you keep your spot on the radar screen. When you are looking for new resources, they know clearly what you have been doing and achieving.

3. Maintain an ongoing assessment of internal and external challenges and opportunities that might enhance or threaten sustainability

By constantly scanning your internal and external environments, you can overcome those challenges that put the program at risk using what you know of your strengths. Issues are then addressed before they offer much of a threat.

4. Identify and support program efficiency and collaboration with other organizations

Here is where organizations can explore creative ways to generate resources other than money. It could include partnering with other organizations and offsetting some of the expenses (e.g. having a local church provide rent by allowing the initiative to work out of its physical facility or provide basic office and mailing expenses). It could include collaborating with another organization with a similar mission to share resources (eg: two counselling programs share a therapist).

5. Foster dialogue with funders

Most funders are aware of the sustainability challenges organizations face and have an interest in assisting them to address them. It is important to keep them informed of the outcomes achieved and challenges being experienced. Most funders have an interest in the program succeeding and will assist you where they can. The relationship is further enhanced when you share with your funder new information about changing needs as they emerge.

6. Seek other resources for specific aspects or enhanced aspects of the program

Even though you have funding to run the program for a specific time, it is important to have resources up your sleeve to maintain the program should the original funding source end. One way is to seek funds for supplemental programs that compliment the existing one and increase the likelihood that the planned results will be achieved. Once additional funding is secured, the organization has a larger program to manage but it also has more flexibility in resource allocation. By expanding your funding base, you are also expanding your support base. Both funders now have an interest in the program succeeding. They can also demonstrate to their decision makers that their funds are being used to leverage other resources.

Tool 18 provides a guide to sustainability planning.

Tool 17

Managing for Sustainability

Purpose

To help your group use outcome measurement to plan for ongoing sustainability.

When to Use

Throughout the planning, implementation and evaluation phases.

Description

This tool provides a set of considerations for activities at each stage of the planning and management process.

How to Use

Increasingly funders are asking for sustainability plans at the very outset and, at times, in the initial proposal. You can get a hard start by addressing sustainability at each stage of project planning, implementation and evaluation.

Use the following chart as a framework for discussions at each stage.

	Activity	Considerations
Strategy Analysis	Need Assessment/ Environmental Scan	Obtain participants' perspectives about their organizational and initiative specific sustainability needs and wants.
	Analysis of funding trends	Get a sense of what other funders are supporting or are willing to support and whether it matches the initiative's focus. Identify government agencies or foundation that are potential partners.
	Evidence of what works	Include sustainability as a criterion when gathering evidence of what works.
	Theory of Change	Estimate how long the funders need to commit to an initiative or its focus in order to make a difference.
	Theory of Sustainability	Determine what aspects of the initiative need to be sustained. Determine what needs to be in place to achieve sustainability.
	Strategy Management	Goals and Objectives
Initiative participant selection		Develop selection criteria that fits with both the theory of change and theory of sustainability.
Initiative structure and tactics		Make expectations about the funder's role in sustainability clear up front. Have participants include a plan for sustainability in proposals.
Evaluation Design		Make sustainability an outcome to be tracked to feed back formative and summative information. Incorporate opportunities to report back on sustainability. Track contextual variable that will impact sustainability.
Evaluation Reporting		Build in points to ask "does this program deserve to be sustained?" Build in opportunities to reflect on and make midcourse changes based on what is being learned about sustainability.
Reporting to Funders		Report regularly to the funder about sustainability efforts.

Adapted from: Coffman, Julia and Bohan-Baker, Marielle. 2003. "Sustainability: Does Evaluation Have a Role?" The Evaluation Exchange Volume IX, No 3, Fall 2003. Available online at: <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/eval/issue23/theory.ht>

Tool 18

Commentaries, Tips, Tools, Techniques and Additional Links to Help You Implement Outcome Measurement

On how and why the Canadian Government has committed itself to an outcomes orientation in public spending...

www.tbs-sct.gc.ca

The Treasury Board Secretariat. This Canadian Government agency provides advice and support to Ministers in the Federal Government about their role of ensuring value for money. It also provides oversight of the financial management functions in departments and agencies. Results for Canadians: A Management Framework for the Government of Canada is a particularly

important document for those implementing outcome measurement with federal government support. It sets out a framework for management in the Government of Canada and an agenda for change in the way that departments and agencies manage and deliver their programs and services. To get to this document, enter 'Results for Canadians' in the Search Engine.

On outcomes focused planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting among voluntary organizations...

www.vserp.ca

The Voluntary Sector Evaluation Research Project (VSERP). The VSERP Web site serves as a resource centre for access and comment on evaluation models, frameworks and tools, and provides a discussion forum for issues related to assessing performance in voluntary organizations. The section "VSERP research" contains new evaluation resources which provide guidance and practical advice to voluntary organizations in making strategic choices about assessing their performance. VSERP is a joint initiative of the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, Centre for Voluntary Sector Research and Development, Carleton University, United Way of Canada - Centraide Canada, YMCA Canada, Volunteer Canada, Max Bell Foundation, CCAF Canada (formerly the Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation), Community Foundations of Canada and Philanthropic Foundations Canada and is being funded by a Community-University Research Alliance grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), an independent federal granting agency, and the Max Bell Foundation.

national.unitedway.org/outcomes

The United Way of America's Outcome Measurement Resource Network. The web-site offers information, downloadable documents, and links to resources related to the identification and measurement of program- and community-level outcomes.

www.mapfornonprofits.org

Management Assistance Program for Non-Profits. Click on the Free Management Library. It includes original material, which is updated regularly by MAP consulting managers, specialists in nonprofit management practices. The site also provides links to the best nonprofit resources on the Internet. It is a free community resource intended for users across the world.

www.mande.co.uk

MandE News. A news service focusing on developments in monitoring and evaluation methods relevant to development projects and programs with social development objectives. MandE NEWS is supported by: Oxfam (GB), Save the Children Fund (UK), ActionAid (UK), Christian Aid, CAFOD (UK), CIIR (UK), IDRC (Canada), World Vision (UK), WWF (UK) and Exchange via BOND.

www.hmrp.net/CanadianOutcomesInstitute

Canadian Outcomes Research Institute. This web-site describes the work of this Canadian non-profit educational and research organization in four key areas: educational services, HOMES database, resources and research. Click on "Resources" to access various tools that can assist in implementing outcome-based planning and management.