

Assessing Program Sustainability Rubric

Purpose: You can use this rubric to self-assess progress on different dimensions of program sustainability. There are many ways to think about sustainability, including sustaining the programs themselves, staff support for programs, maintaining a focus on the mission or goals, and/or sustaining the outcomes (even within other organizations).

Dimensions of Sustainability

- Funding
- Personnel
- Propagation
- Evaluation & Learning
- Culture
- Information Resources
- Partnerships

Stages of Sustainability

Developing: Early-stage development of activities and practices that promote program sustainability

Stabilizing: There is evidence of practices that are conducive to program sustainability, but there remain barriers to sustainability, or opportunities to improve these practices

Optimizing: The project or program is operating in an institutional environment or using practices that are highly conducive toward program sustainability

Tips for using this rubric

- Remember that you can move in between the stages at any time, so work is needed to maintain a stage.
- Dimensions are **not** meant to be quantified or weighted; all are important for different aspects of sustainability.
- Consider filling this out individually then discussing your responses as a team to develop consensus.
- You can use this at many different levels of your organization: program, activity, change team, organization overall.
- The “Stabilizing” stage often uses “somewhat” as a response option which means you are doing something but you could improve or do more.

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For a digital copy of this rubric developed out of work with the NSF Eddie Bernice Johnson INCLUDES Aspire Alliance by UW CERSE, please visit <https://bit.ly/ProgSustainRubric> or scan this QR code:



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FUNDING Definition: money or financial resources to support the implementation and propagation of the program			
	<i>Developing</i>	<i>Stabilizing</i>	<i>Optimizing</i>
Are funding sources currently sufficient to sustain program activities for the next 12+ months?	No/Don't know	Yes, for 12 months	Yes, for 12+ months
How diversified is your funding portfolio?	Not at all	Somewhat	Highly
Are current or projected funds mostly soft/temporary or hard/permanent?	Mostly soft	Mixed	Mostly hard
Can your funding sources be readily renewed as needed?	No/Don't know	Yes, for some	Yes, for most/all
Have additional funding sources been identified to meet potential changes in current funding or program activities?	No	Yes, for small changes	Yes, for substantial changes
Do your funders allow for flexibility to adapt programming as needed?	No	Somewhat/ in some cases	Yes
How flexible is your organizational strategy to respond to new funding opportunities?	Not at all	Somewhat	Highly
If a major funding source will end in the next 12 months, have you applied for new funding?	No	Yes, we've submitted one application	Yes, we've submitted more than one application

Evidence of Successes:
Evidence of Challenges:
What to take action on:
Who will take action (and what role each person will have, if more than one person):
Timeline for action:
Support needed from project colleagues:

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PERSONNEL			
Definition: people involved in the planning and implementation of the project, including employees, volunteers, contractors, etc.			
	<i>Developing</i>	<i>Stabilizing</i>	<i>Optimizing</i>
Are there paid staff hours allocated to all aspects of the work? (e.g. project management, onboarding and offboarding, reporting, grant writing).	No	For some areas/ some paid	Yes
Are paid staff hours <i>sufficient</i> to cover all essential project tasks? (e.g. project management, onboarding and offboarding, reporting, grant writing).	No	For some areas/ some paid	Yes, no unpaid labor
Are people charged with project management and post-award duties qualified and competent in their roles?	No	Somewhat	Yes
Are people charged with grant writing and other pre-award duties qualified or competent in their roles?	No	Somewhat	Yes
Does your team have all of the expertise and formal training that is required for project functions, (e.g. financial management/accounting, evaluation, grant writing, communications, etc)	No	For some areas/ could be better	Yes
Do you have a leadership succession plan?	No	Yes, informally	Yes, formally
Is the culture in your organization/project receptive to changes in leadership?	No	Somewhat	Yes
Are there other organizational or resource-related constraints on changing leadership responsibilities when needed?	Yes	Somewhat/ in some cases	No
To what extent are leadership responsibilities and capabilities diffused across multiple people?	Not at all	Somewhat	Highly

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Support needed from project colleagues:			
INFORMATION RESOURCES			
Definition: Documentation, data, reports for key program processes, policies and other information that are necessary to the program			
	<i>Developing</i>	<i>Stabilizing</i>	<i>Optimizing</i>
Do you have clear and detailed documentation for onboarding/offboarding?	No	Somewhat or only for one, not both	Yes
Do you have clear and detailed documentation for strategic planning?	No	Somewhat	Yes
Do you have clear and detailed documentation for communications and marketing?	No	Somewhat	Yes
Do you have clear and detailed documentation for financial planning?	No	Somewhat	Yes
Do you have clear and detailed documentation for grant writing?	No	Somewhat	Yes
Do you have clear and detailed documentation for reporting?	No	Somewhat	Yes
Do you have clear and detailed documentation for propagation planning?	No	Somewhat	Yes
Have you institutionalized training and support processes to aid personnel in executing program functions?	Not at all	For some areas/ could be better	Yes
Are new staff and program participants given sufficient materials to learn about the work they will do on the program?	No	Somewhat	Yes

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PROPAGATION			
Definition: Propagation requires developing and sharing an innovation responsive to the needs, interests, and situations of potential adopters. It has only occurred when an innovation is used successfully by others. Requires dissemination. (Stanford et al., 2015)			
	<i>Developing</i>	<i>Stabilizing</i>	<i>Optimizing</i>
Have you identified any likely adopters of your program or any of its activities?	No	Somewhat	Yes
How well do your planned propagation activities cater to the needs of potential adopters?	Not at all / none planned	Somewhat	Highly
Do you have a plan for supporting adopters as they take up and adapt these activities?	No / no activities planned	Somewhat	Yes
Do leaders of your organization prioritize this propagation work?	No / no activities planned	Somewhat	Yes

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EVALUATION AND LEARNING			
Definition: the systematic collection and analysis of relevant data to assess program implementation and outcomes, and the integration of insights from these data to promote or amplify positive impacts			
	<i>Developing</i>	<i>Stabilizing</i>	<i>Optimizing</i>
Have you established a formal feedback mechanism, like an advisory board, steering committee, or a governing committee, which is central to the program's planning and governance?	No	Somewhat	Yes
Does the above governing body meet more than once per year?	No	Sometimes	Yes
Do you have an evaluation plan that is used to identify, analyze, and report on progress and lessons learned?	No	Somewhat	Yes
Are you collecting data on the performance of the program regularly? (Consider amount and quality of data)	No	Somewhat	Yes
Is organizational learning part of your established practice and culture?	No	Somewhat	Yes
Have you articulated a path toward realizing your organizational goals, with benchmarks to measure progress?	No	Somewhat	Yes
Are organizational goals aligned with the organization's mission?	No	Somewhat	Yes
Are feedback and evaluation data used to reallocate funds as needed?	No	Somewhat	Yes

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CULTURE			
Definition: the nature of the project's values, attitudes, systems, and rules, as well as the degree of its attentiveness to matters of power, positionality, and justice affecting the implementation of positive change			
	<i>Developing</i>	<i>Stabilizing</i>	<i>Optimizing</i>
Do organizational leaders prioritize the project's work?	No	Somewhat	Yes
How inclusive are strategy discussions and decision-making processes?	Closed to a small circle of people	Somewhat inclusive	Inclusive of all relevant community members
Is community feedback actively sought?	No	Somewhat	Yes
Is community feedback actively incorporated into program strategy and activities?	No	Somewhat	Yes
Do community members involved with the program have an awareness of the underlying challenges the program is attempting to ameliorate?	No/unsure	Somewhat	Yes
Do relevant community members view the program as making a positive contribution in its area of focus?	No/unsure	Somewhat	Yes
Are relationships with funding partners trusting and oriented toward continuous improvement?	No	Somewhat	Yes
Are relationships with other partners trusting and oriented toward continuous improvement?	No	Somewhat	Yes
How responsive is organizational strategy to community/target population concerns?	Not at all	Somewhat	Highly
How invested is the broader community in contributing to the program's strategic direction?	Not at all	Somewhat	Highly
Is equity prioritized in all decision-making processes?	No	Somewhat	Yes
Is equity prioritized in the organization's mission AND its activities?	No	Somewhat/ in one aspect only	Yes

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PARTNERSHIPS			
Expansion Partners: other organizations implementing your program for individual or institutional change Coordination Partner: other organizations that support your implementation to advance positive change.			
	<i>Developing</i>	<i>Stabilizing</i>	<i>Optimizing</i>
Have you cultivated strong partnerships with possible adopters?	No	Somewhat	Yes
Have you cultivated strong partnerships with organizations that are helping to advance the project's goals?	No	Somewhat	Yes
How prepared are partners to autonomously take on relevant parts of the work?	Not at all	Somewhat	Highly
Have you offered advice, support, or resources to support any potential adopters?	No	Somewhat	Yes

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