

| Strategy. | Capacity. | Sustainability.

# Quick Course

*From the CHSD Team*

**Positioning for Sustainability:  
A Formative Assessment Tool**



# Welcome!

This Self-Assessment Tool is provided by the Georgia Health Policy Center (GHPC) to assist you and your local partners in preparing NOW for the long-term viability and success of your local health initiatives. Whether you are just beginning to implement a new program or you have been operating for several years, the experiences of other rural communities demonstrate that valuable programs and collaborations can be sustained long-term with foresight and effective planning. Do not wait until your initial funding is about to run out to begin thinking about how to continue the important work you have begun. This document can help you better position yourself for sustainability and prepare for the future by becoming more strategic and intentional in your everyday decisions and actions!

By the end of the assessment process, you and your team will:

- Become more aware of the critical areas of strategy, capacity and action necessary for sustaining community-based health initiatives, particularly in rural areas;
- Complete a Sustainability Formative Assessment – a structured process to help your team reflect on how well your program is currently positioned for sustainability relative to each of the dimensions of the Sustainability Framework©; and
- Create a plan for improving your sustainability potential by building key competencies associated with long-term viability and impact.

For maximum impact, be sure to include your program collaborators in this self-study process. By working together to complete this assessment, you can achieve a shared understanding of the key attributes of sustainable coalitions and programs, reflect on your current performance relative to those characteristics, and also create a foundation for improving your sustainability potential over time. Incorporating a broad range of perspectives will help to clarify your current strengths and generate interest in addressing areas of need that you identify together.

## What is included in this tool?

This document includes not only a practical Sustainability Self-Assessment Tool but also important background information that will help you get the most from the assessment process.

**What does sustainability mean?** In this section sustainability is broadly defined based on the experience of hundreds of rural health initiatives nationwide.

**What do sustainable programs and coalitions have in common?** A *Sustainability Framework*© is included to describe the fundamental characteristics and capacities associated with long-term viability and lasting community impact. This framework is derived from the current literature and GHPC's extensive field experience providing a broad range of technical assistance to more than 500 rural communities over 13 years.

**Why do a formative assessment?** The benefit of a formative assessments is to help you gauge not only how well your program or partnership is positioned for sustainability relative to the *Sustainability Framework*© but also to help you chart a path for improvement in areas of need.

**Are we positioned for sustainability?** A Sustainability Self-Assessment Tool is provided to facilitate the process of identifying areas of strength and opportunities for improvement with a goal of improving the sustainability of your local health initiatives.

**What can we do NOW to improve our sustainability potential?** Tips are offered for analyzing your self-assessment results and planning for the future.

## What does *Sustainability* mean?

Over the past decade, sustainability has been a focus for many government agencies and foundations that fund and operate community-based programs and non-profit organizations. Increasingly, organizations and collaborations are concerned with sustaining programs or services beyond initial grant periods and pilot phases. There are multiple definitions of sustainability used by funders, researchers and community-based organizations. For the purposes of this assessment tool, sustainability is defined as:

*Programs or services continue because they are valued and draw support and resources.*

Sustainability does not necessarily mean that the activities continue in the same form as originally conceived, funded or implemented. Programs often evolve over time to adjust to the changing levels of support and needs of the community. Organizations may start with one approach, but ultimately elect to sustain a different model of service provision after testing it in the community. For example:

- A grant may provide “start-up” funds to establish services that are expanded post-grant period;
- An initial investment may fund a model or pilot program from which a new program approach evolves;
- Programs may be sustained, but the services provided or the coverage area are scaled back to reflect a reduction in resources to support the program.

## What do Sustainable Programs Have in Common?

*Sustainability* is not random luck, nor can it be achieved through a prescribed set of actions. It is important to recognize, however, that sustained programs and organizations appear to have some attributes in common. Based on our experience working with more than 800 rural health initiatives and findings from our study of 102 sustained rural health initiatives, the Georgia Health Policy Center has developed a *Sustainability Framework*©. This framework describes nine areas of strategy, capacity, and action that help to position an organization or program for sustainability (included as an attachment to this document).

1. Strategic Vision

2. Collaboration

3. Leadership

4. Communication

5. Evaluation and ROI

6. Capacity

7. Efficiency & Effectiveness

8. Relevance and Practicality

9. Resource Diversification

It is useful to familiarize yourself with the *Sustainability Framework*© prior to beginning the self-assessment process. The key to understanding each component is to put it into the specific context of sustainability. As you read through the *Sustainability Framework*©, consider how each element may enhance the long-term potential for a program, organization or activity. Leadership, for example, has many applications and benefits. Leadership in the context of sustainability means that you have created a shared vision, have leaders within your team that see the relationship between short-term activities and long-term outcomes, and that you have engaged leaders that will exert their influence in leveraging support and locating resources.

## Why do a Formative Assessment?

At the core of a formative assessment is the goal to “form” or improve. This is a different purpose than that of summative assessments. In a summative assessment, you are being evaluated on the end result, or “sum,” of your efforts.

Both are very useful. Formative assessments are particularly helpful in determining progress and identifying areas to concentrate efforts while there is still time to influence the end result.

Additionally, formative assessments...

**...are designed around rubrics - sets of criteria and standards organized into levels that establish a continuum of increasing expectations of quality.**

**...can be used to chart change over time.**

**...present a clear path for attaining greater levels of quality and performance.**

# Are We Positioned for Sustainability?

The Sustainability Self-Assessment Tool may serve multiple purposes:

- To capture your general level of functioning related to elements of the *Sustainability Framework*®;
- To provide guidance as to what activities or capacities are indicative of improvement or movement along the developmental spectrum;
- To isolate or highlight areas where continued work or development might be needed; and
- To provide a baseline against which change (positive or negative) can be viewed over time.

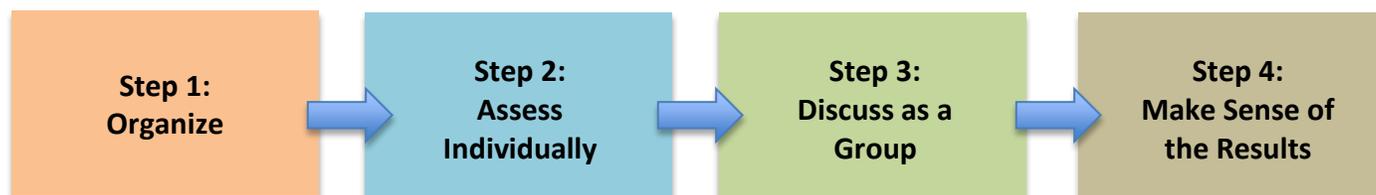
For each component of the *Sustainability Framework*®, developmental rubrics have been described for each level of performance in a table format. These rubrics are not intended to be definitive, meaning you are not necessarily expected to fit each description perfectly. Rather, they are provided to illustrate a continuum along which you might progress with higher levels of performance – giving you an idea of what “improvement” or growth in a particular area might look like.

Before you conduct the self-assessment, take a moment to review the terms used in the tool’s rubric. Each item will ask you to rate yourself in one of four levels. A *general* description of these four levels is provided in the table below. For each level, the one-letter code provided should be used to record your results on the group result chart on the Summary of Results page of the assessment tool.

Level	Description
Pre-Awareness = P	Not yet aware of the importance of the element and/or its relationship to sustainability
Awareness = A	Aware of the importance of the element, but may not have sufficient capacity (e.g., not know how to solve the issue) or motivation (e.g., waiting for leadership and/or direction to address the issue)
Interaction = I	Aware of the importance and have translated available “know-how” and motivation into some sort of initial action on the component; there is evidence of impact on the component in limited ways, though results are likely limited and inconsistent
Mastery = M	Aware, capable, and strategic in their actions. Worthy of being a model in how to address the component for others.

## Conducting the Self-Assessment

With a shared definition of sustainability, an understanding of the range of activities and capacities associated with greater potential for long-term viability, and an appreciation for the value of doing a formative assessment, you are now ready to begin the four-step process of completing the self-assessment.



### Step 1 – Get Organized

The Sustainability Formative Assessment Tool is included as an attachment to this document. Make copies for yourself and others. Make sure everyone completing the assessment has reviewed the background information provided in earlier sections of this document. That context will be critical to their ability to answer the questions in the tool.

### Step 2 – Take time to reflect and react

(Estimated time, 30 minutes)

Next, make sure you've got a block of quiet, uninterrupted time to complete the assessment – likely 20 to 30 minutes. As you read each item and the practical examples for each level, you might say to yourself, "Well, we do a few things at the Pre-Awareness level and a few at the Awareness level – which are we?" In these situations choose the level that you think most represents your current state. Remember, this tool isn't intended to be used for exact measurements, rather as an indication to plan and chart progress. You may want to refer to the earlier table in this section that describes each level in very general terms.

It is important to note that while we all have the innate desire to demonstrate our worthiness and success, it's unlikely that you will be able to honestly rate yourself at interaction or mastery on many, if any items. That's okay – it's expected. There is no "failing score" on this assessment. It only adds value when users have the courage to see things as they are, not as they hope them to be. You are beginning the important step of identifying and working to address areas of need.

Be sure to record your responses on the summary page of the Self-Assessment Tool. For those components that are broken into multiple rubrics – for example, Efficiency and Effectiveness - select an overall score that reflects your assessment.

## Step 3 – Come together to share responses

(Estimated time = 2 to 3 hours)

If you will be completing the assessment with your partners or collaborators, convene the group once everyone has worked through the tool independently. You will likely need to select a facilitator for this part of the process, a person who can ensure that the conversation is productive and that everyone has a chance to contribute to the dialogue. Set aside a couple of hours to complete the tool and allow ample time to decide on next steps.

First, ask people to compile their individual results onto the individual summary table on the Summary of Results page of the Self-Assessment Tool if they've not already done so. This one-page summary will make dialogue easier as people will avoid flipping through pages during discussion.

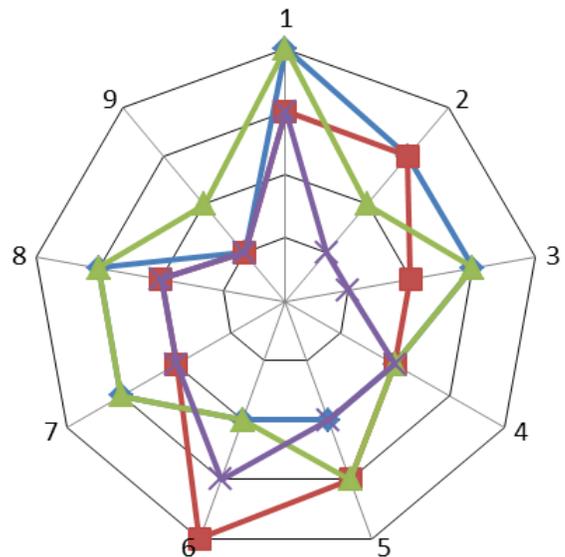
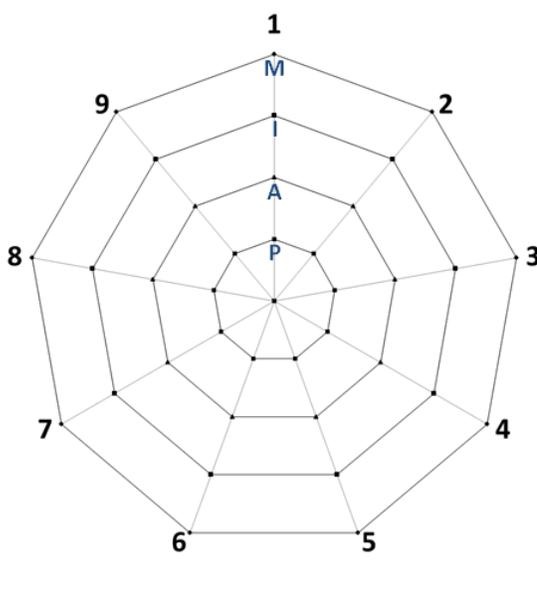
Component	Current Status			
	Pre-Awareness (P)	Awareness (A)	Interaction (I)	Mastery (M)
1. Strategic Vision				
2. Collaboration				
3. Leadership				
4. Communication				
5. Evaluation and ROI				
6. Capacity				
7. Efficiency & Effectiveness				
8. Relevance and Practicality				
9. Resource Diversification				

### Individual Summary of Results

Next, use individual summaries to plot each person's response on the collective radar chart. Designate each person with a unique color, plot their score on each axis, and connect their scores with lines. Use the following key for the axes:

1. Strategic Vision
2. Collaboration
3. Leadership
4. Communication
5. Evaluation and ROI
6. Capacity
7. Efficiency & Effectiveness
8. Relevance and Practicality
9. Resource Diversification

Below are the blank radar chart and a sample chart plotted with collective group responses. Once you have plotted your own team's results plotted, it is time to understand what the results mean.



## Step 4 – Make Sense of the Results

The radar chart is useful because the visual representation of the responses allows for easier interpretation of the results. You may need to remind group members with a background in statistics and research that this process is formative and, as such, does not require in-depth score analysis. Rather, the goal is to use the score summary as a tool for facilitating reflective dialogue with your team.

There are three perspectives to consider when reviewing the summary of scores.

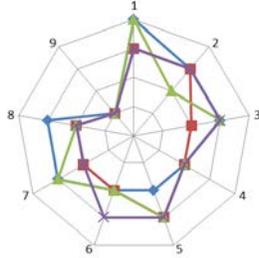
1. How consistent are the responses?
2. What is the overall sense of performance?
3. What is the sense of performance for each of the nine components?

Work with your team to answer each question. Following is a guide to help facilitate this discussion.

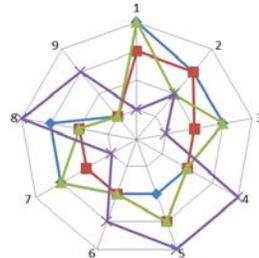
## 1. How consistent are the responses?

Consistency of responses is the starting place for discussion. Highly consistent responses indicate there is consensus about the current state of your efforts. Generally, your team's summary will fall into one of three categories:

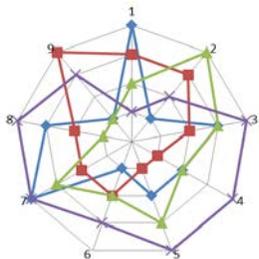
### A. Consistent – most scores are within one ranking of each other



### B. Outlier(s) – most scores are within one ranking of each other except for one or two which are greatly different (the purple score in this example)



### C. Divergent – answers vary considerably on multiple components



Once you have determined which category best describes your team, it could be useful to discuss the following insights and questions.

#### A. Consistent

- *This may be an indication that your team employs effective strategies to keep your members informed and engaged. What tools and tactics do we credit most with keeping all team members informed and involved in the progress of our initiative?*

#### B. Outlier(s)

- *Is there an easy explanation for the outlying score(s)?*
- *Is there an opportunity to reach greater consensus on the scores?*

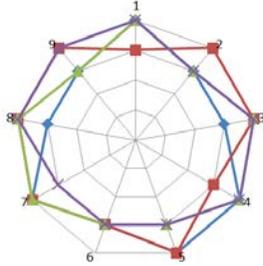
#### C. Divergent

- *What might be some of the reasons for the divergent scores among our team?*
- *Is there a need to discuss each component to reach consensus on a generally accepted score for each?*

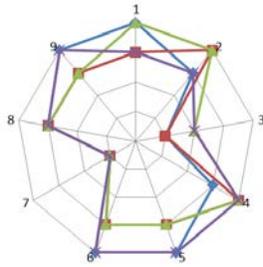
## 2. What is the overall sense of performance?

Overall performance is the next topic for your group to consider. It is best to take a “big picture” perspective of the initiative before diving into details of a particular component. Generally, your team’s summary will fall into one of three categories:

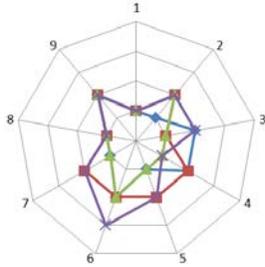
### A. High – scores on most components are high (3 or 4)



### B. Gaps – scores on some components are high and some are low



### C. Low – scores on most components are low (1 or 2)



Once you have determined which category best describes your team, it could be useful to discuss the following insights and questions.

#### **A. High**

- *Are these high scores merited or did our team wish to avoid being critical?*

#### **B. Gaps**

- *What do the score gaps tell us about our efforts?*

#### **C. Low**

- *Are these low scores merited or did our team not want to be overly generous?*

### 3. What is the sense of performance for each of the nine components?

Next, discuss each of the nine components. Use the following questions to facilitate discussion on each.

- *What conclusion can we draw from this score?*
- *What have we done to contribute to this score?*
- *Are there efforts in place now that will likely impact this score in the future? (e.g., an activity that is likely to succeed but will take time for results)*

After completing the assessment and making sense of your results, your organization or collaborative should be better able to answer the question posed at the beginning of this section, “Are we positioned for sustainability?” Hopefully, the formative assessment process and tools have helped you focus more intently on the key capacities and strengths associated with long-term viability, reflect on your current performance, and engage in strategic conversations with your partners. You can also use the results as a benchmark for your continued progress.

The final section of this guide can help you improve your potential for sustainability through strategic action.

# What Can We Do Today to Improve our Sustainability Potential?

The outcome of this exercise should be improved likelihood of sustainability. The discussion and insights may be useful but without action in a positive direction this is merely an academic exercise. It's likely your team has already identified areas to work on and initiated a plan of action. To assist with your efforts, suggested next steps are presented in relation to the three most common scenarios. These are general suggestions and are based on the Georgia Health Policy Center's years of experience in providing technical assistance to teams such as yours. They are, however, suggestions and should be carefully considered for appropriateness and effectiveness by your team.

## 1. We couldn't reach consensus on our score summary.

Suggested actions:

- *Identify the cause of the inconsistency. Is there a lack of information or differing perspectives of performance?*
- *Address lack of information by creating forums for team members to receive information and ask questions.*
- *Have the group complete the assessment again in 4-6 weeks and determine consistency of responses.*
- *Call another meeting and use a voting method to determine a score for each of the components.*
- *Determine if the composition of the team needs to be altered in the case of someone purposely subverting the process.*

## 2. We scored consistently low on the components.

Suggested actions:

- *Identify the cause of the low scores – true measure of performance or tendency to be critical?*
- *Review the need for sustainability of this program or initiative.*
- *Review capacity of team – is it feasible to expect additional efforts?*
- *If committed to sustainability, identify three or four key areas to focus on in the near term; it's not feasible to address all nine at once.*
  - *Strategic Vision and Leadership are usually regarded as essential initial components*

### 3. We want to improve our score(s) on one or more components.

Suggested actions:

- *Carefully review the scoring rubric on the Assessment Tool. It provides the criteria needed to attain higher levels of performance.*
- *Recognize that moving from Interaction (3) to Mastery (4) usually requires time, practice, and feedback. It will take much more time and effort to move from 3 to 4 than from 1 to 2, or 2 to 3.*
- *Determine a plan of action that includes deadlines and someone responsible for leading each task.*

Congratulations on completing an important step toward sustainability. As you continue your important work in the community, continue to think and act strategically, and build your capacity related to the components of the *Sustainability Framework*®. In a year or so you may choose to reassess your performance, taking time to both celebrate progress and make new plans for continued improvement. Positioning for sustainability is an ongoing effort and a focus on these components will greatly expand your options in the future.



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