



| Strategy. | Capacity. | Sustainability.

# Sustainability Formative Self-Assessment Tool

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## **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.

## **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 your organization/network/consortium 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	<b>Not yet aware of the importance of the element and/or its relationship to sustainability</b>
Awareness = A	<b>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)</b>
Interaction = I	<b>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</b>
Mastery = M	<b>Aware, capable, and strategic in their actions. Worthy of being a model in how to address the component for others.</b>



Component: Strategic Vision		Current Status			
		Pre-Awareness	Awareness	Interaction	Mastery
	<b>The organization has a clearly defined vision for what it hopes to achieve</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Organization views all program activities as short-term in nature	<input type="checkbox"/> Organization recognizes need for long-term planning, but remains focused on short-term program implementation	<input type="checkbox"/> Organization has long-term concept for specific program implementation	<input type="checkbox"/> Organization views program as part of long-term approach for systemic change
	<b>All those associated with organization share its vision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Vision is developed in isolation of partners	<input type="checkbox"/> Vision is developed with limited input from partners and no commitment	<input type="checkbox"/> Partners participate in development of vision, but without organizational commitment	<input type="checkbox"/> All partners develop, share, and are committed to vision
	<b>All activities are aligned with vision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Activities are not defined or implemented in reference to stated vision	<input type="checkbox"/> Activities are oriented to address specific issue but are not aligned with any long-term vision	<input type="checkbox"/> All activities are oriented to a specific issue and some are aligned with a long-term vision	<input type="checkbox"/> All activities contribute to fulfilling a long-term strategic vision

Component: Collaboration		Current Status			
		Pre-Awareness	Awareness	Interaction	Mastery
	<b>Partnerships include stakeholders necessary for the successful planning, implementation, and/or continuation of programs and services</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Partnerships formed in order to fulfill funding	<input type="checkbox"/> Partnerships are based on previous relationships that may or may not be appropriate to address the problem	<input type="checkbox"/> Partnerships are assessed and expanded to include organizations that can address the problem	<input type="checkbox"/> Partnerships include all organizations needed to strategically address the problem
	<b>Partners play an integral role and have a shared interest in the outcomes</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Lead organization performs all program activities and retains all financial resources	<input type="checkbox"/> Lead organization performs most program activities with participation by some partners	<input type="checkbox"/> Most partners engage in program activities, some resources are shared among partners	<input type="checkbox"/> Partners jointly make decisions about overall program direction and utilization of resources and have a shared interest in project outcomes



Component: Leadership	Current Status			
	Pre-Awareness	Awareness	Interaction	Mastery
<p><b>Inspires others to create and achieve a shared vision</b></p> <p><b>Understands the relationship between short-term activities and their impact on long-term success</b></p> <p><b>Exerts influence in leveraging support and resources</b></p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Leadership operates independently to implement the work plan with no strategic involvement from others	<input type="checkbox"/> Leadership engages partners in short-term problem-solving focused on work plan implementation	<input type="checkbox"/> Leadership engages partners in developing strategies for long-term success	<input type="checkbox"/> Leadership engages others to define, accomplish, and sustain its vision through a shared sense of responsibility by creating an environment of collaboration and enthusiasm

Component: Communication	Current Status			
	Pre-Awareness	Awareness	Interaction	Mastery
<p><b>The organization defines perceptions, translates successes, and creates awareness through effective communication</b></p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Organization has no plan for communicating program to the community, and funders and other stakeholders are unaware of program	<input type="checkbox"/> Organization makes use of some public media (e.g., press releases, newsletters) and other methods on an ad hoc basis to update the community on its program activities	<input type="checkbox"/> Organization regularly uses public media and other methods to update the community on both its activities and program effectiveness	<input type="checkbox"/> Organization has developed targeted messages and a communications strategy that effectively utilizes available media channels to build awareness and public support for program
<p><b>Information is exchanged among partners and stakeholders through structured and informal channels.</b></p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Communication is limited to one-on-one interaction between lead agency and partners as needed	<input type="checkbox"/> Communication and interaction amongst partners occurs only during infrequent meetings	<input type="checkbox"/> Partners communicate amongst themselves during regularly scheduled meetings	<input type="checkbox"/> Partners and stakeholders proactively initiate communication amongst themselves



Component: Evaluation & "Return on Investments"	Current Status			
	Pre-Awareness	Awareness	Interaction	Mastery
<p><b>Evaluation generates data necessary to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• monitor and manage program implementation,</li> <li>• measure program impact, and</li> <li>• demonstrate social, economic, and/or health benefits to community served.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> There is no evaluation plan in support of the program	<input type="checkbox"/> Evaluation activities generate data that are used to monitor program activities	<input type="checkbox"/> Evaluation activities generate data that are used to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• monitor program activities</li> <li>• inform and adjust program implementation</li> <li>• measure program impact</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> Evaluation activities generate data that are used to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• satisfy funder's reporting requirements</li> <li>• monitor program activities</li> <li>• manage program implementation</li> <li>• measure program impact</li> <li>• demonstrate social, economic, and/or health benefits to community served</li> </ul>

Component: Capacity	Current Status			
	Pre-Awareness	Awareness	Interaction	Mastery
<p><b>Organization has adequate capacity to complete programs based on:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personnel with necessary skills and knowledge, and</li> <li>• Experience with projects of similar scope or focus.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> Organizational staff and experience do not match the magnitude or focus of the proposed program	<input type="checkbox"/> Organization has an understanding of the necessary staff and experience in order to implement a similar program	<input type="checkbox"/> Organization understands necessary staffing levels and capabilities and has experience in implementing unrelated programs of a similar magnitude	<input type="checkbox"/> Organization has a track record of completing programs of similar magnitude within budget and on time



Component: Efficiency & Effectiveness	Current Status			
	Pre-Awareness	Awareness	Interaction	Mastery
<b>Organizational operations maximize the ability of those being served to participate and produce intended results</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Those being served are not consulted in program design and implementation	<input type="checkbox"/> Feedback from those being served has little influence on program design and implementation	<input type="checkbox"/> Feedback gained through formal methods, such as surveys and focus groups, is used to guide program design and implementation	<input type="checkbox"/> Those receiving services have an integral role in program design and implementation
<b>Program approach is based on the successes and challenges of similar initiatives</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Programs developed without knowledge of evidence based programs or consultation with other similar successful programs	<input type="checkbox"/> Programs developed with cursory understanding of similar initiatives	<input type="checkbox"/> Programs developed following consultation with others who have implemented similar programs	<input type="checkbox"/> Programs are derived from evidence-based initiatives
<b>Organization draws from and contributes to existing community resources</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Program services operate independently of other related community initiatives	<input type="checkbox"/> Program services draw from and offer limited support to other related community initiatives	<input type="checkbox"/> Program provides unique and complementary services to the community	<input type="checkbox"/> Program has an integrated role in the provision of services in the community; others recognize and support that role



Component: Relevance and Practicality		Current Status			
		Pre -Awareness	Awareness	Interaction	Mastery
	<b>Approach based on a clear assessment and understanding of the need</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Organization not aware of information or data to demonstrate the need for the strategy/approach	<input type="checkbox"/> Organization utilizes some state and regional data to demonstrate need for local strategy/approach	<input type="checkbox"/> Organization utilizes past Community Needs Assessment and regional/state data to demonstrate need for strategy/approach	<input type="checkbox"/> Organization uses current Community Needs Assessment and regional/state data to shape implementation of strategy/approach
	<b>Approach tailored to the environment (cultural, political, economic)</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> The approach does not take into account contextual factors that may inhibit or facilitate successful implementation (e.g. geography, policies, local culture)	<input type="checkbox"/> Organization is aware of some key contextual factors that may affect implementation of the strategy/approach, but they have not taken action to address those factors in their implementation plan	<input type="checkbox"/> Organization has identified some contextual factors that may affect implementation and are taking action to deal with those factors	<input type="checkbox"/> Organization exhibits deep understanding of the context within which they operate and has designed an approach that takes into account current contextual factors
	<b>The approach is likely to accomplish desired impact because it takes into account the magnitude or complexity of the problem</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> The approach is not relevant or practical given the complexity of the problem	<input type="checkbox"/> The approach is a stop gap measure to serve short-term needs with no attempt to address multiple aspects or root causes of the issue	<input type="checkbox"/> The approach is matched appropriately to the complexity of the problem being addressed. For more complex problems, the approach is multi-pronged/ integrated	<input type="checkbox"/> The approach was designed with a deep understanding of the root causes of the problem at hand and uses leverage to address the issue in a comprehensive manner

Component: Resource Diversification		Current Status			
		Pre-Awareness	Awareness	Interaction	Mastery
	<b>Organization receives diversity of support generated through sustainability planning</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Program supported by a single funding source; does not engage in sustainability planning	<input type="checkbox"/> Program supported by more than one source without benefit of sustainability planning	<input type="checkbox"/> Program supported by a variety of sources developed through an ad hoc approach to sustainability planning	<input type="checkbox"/> Multiple sources contribute adequate funding for long-term program continuation; support generated through formal, on-going sustainability planning

