

Going the Distance: Using Self-Assessment to Help Sustain Collaborative Efforts

Sustaining the good work of community collaboratives is a multi-faceted task. While fund development is an important part of sustainability, there are other ways to ensure the work of the collaborative continues. Community ownership of collaborative efforts is crucial. A community that values the work of a collaborative will do much to make sure the work continues. When a community owns collaborative work, the community becomes a "constitency" that is able to advocate for such work in local, regional and state policy arenas. In addition to fund development, community mobilization and policy work, successful community collaboratives also understand the value of being pro-active in spinning off or institutionalizing their successful efforts.

Center for Collaborative Planning (CCP) originally created this Sustainability Self-Assessment by blending the work of Tom Wolff, AHEC/Community Partners, Amherst, MA, with a self-assessment protocol created for the Community Partnerships for Healthy Children initiative. Fifteen community collaboratives in northern California successfully used a version of this assessment to develop sustainability plans to take them beyond nine years of Sierra Health Foundation funding.

This Sustainability Assessment is comprised of four benchmarks and a process that combines a facilitated conversation with action planning. The criteria on the benchmarks can also serve as a kind of tip sheet, i.e. steps you might follow to be successful in each of the sustainability areas.

We encourage you to explore how you can use a combination of these strategies to ensure your collaborative continues its important work in the community. We also encourage you to do a sustainability assessment "sooner rather than later."

Benchmark I: Community Mobilization

A collaborative successful at this sustainability strategy understands that the gifts, talents, skills and capacities of individuals are essential building blocks for strong, healthy communities. This collaborative has mobilized community residents who are committed to sustaining efforts to improve health and well-being. A mobilized citizenry that feels ownership of, and contributes to, collaborative efforts is key to long-term sustainability

Criteria:

1. The collaborative has systematically identified the gifts, talents, skills and capacities of community residents.
2. The collaborative has provided opportunities for these gifts and capacities to be contributed.
3. These gifts and capacities are being used to sustain collaborative efforts.
4. The collaborative has acknowledged and celebrated contributions that have been made.

Process:

1. Identify the Successes and Challenges your collaborative has had in meeting each of the criteria.
2. Identify Actions to Address your Challenges.
3. Prioritize Actions (Note: A really effective way to prioritize actions is to ask "Who's willing to take the lead to make this happen?" If someone has the energy and desire to take a strategy on, include it in your action planning.)
4. Create Action plan from prioritized actions. Include who will do what by when?

EXAMPLE : The following actions grew out of a discussion of the first criteria:

Action	Lead	Timeline
Create capacity inventory	Angela	March 30, 2002
Administer capacity inventory in neighborhood	Sal	September 30, 2002
Analyze data	Nicki leads collaborative	January 15, 2003 At collaborative meeting

Benchmark II. Policy and Systems Change

A collaborative successful at this sustainability strategy views a mobilized local citizenry as an effective constituency to improve the community's health and well-being. The collaborative has built its own capacity, and the capacity of the citizenry, to understand how policy is made and influenced, and to develop and implement policy and systems change strategies. This collaborative sustains its efforts to improve health and well-being through policy and systems change at the local, regional and state level.

Criteria:

1. The collaborative has **mapped local institutions and formal policy bodies** to see where and how rules, laws and regulations are made.
2. The collaborative has **built relationships to gain support** of local institutions and formal policy bodies.
3. The collaborative has **mapped the larger policy arena** including regional and state decision-making bodies to see where and how policies are made.
4. The collaborative has **built relationships in larger policy arenas**.
5. The collaborative has **provided opportunities for community members** (constituency) to participate in mapping and relationship building.
6. The collaborative has **built constituency capacity in advocacy skills**.
7. The collaborative has **developed policy strategies** through the following steps:
 - a. **Identified barriers** to sustaining collaborative efforts.
 - b. **Identified which policies and/or systems** need to be influenced/changed to overcome barriers.
 - c. **Included community members** (constituency) in identification, development and/or refinement of policy strategies.
 - d. **Provided advocacy opportunities** for constituency with decision-making bodies?
8. The collaborative has **implemented policy and systems change strategies**
 - a. What are they?
 - b. If not, why not?

Process: See Benchmark I for self-assessment and action planning process.

Benchmark III: Spin-Offs

A collaborative successful at this sustainability strategy is able to attract resources to continue its successful strategies, activities or programs. As a long-term sustainability strategy, the collaborative might view itself as a catalyst and is proactive in spinning off (or institutionalizing) its effective strategies to local institutions and/or associations. The successful collaborative might also attract partners to help sustain its core functioning.

Criteria:

1. The collaborative and a mobilized citizenry have **identified prospects**.

EXAMPLES

Institutions

Local Schools

Local Government: Cities/Counties

Community Services departments

Parks and Recreation

Non Profits (e.g. Community Based Organizations, YMCA's, Boys and Girls clubs, Head Starts)

Local Councils (e.g. CAPCC – Child Abuse Prevention Council,

CCPC – (Child Care Planning Council)

County Children and Families Commission (Prop 10)

Associations

Service Clubs – Kiwanis, Rotary, Soroptomists, AAUW

Churches, Faith-Based Organizations, Interfaith Councils

Neighborhood Associations

Chambers of Commerce

Women's Networks and Business Associations

2. The collaborative has **built relationships** with prospects.
3. The collaborative has begun to **share ownership of present work**.
4. The collaborative has **built a case for ongoing support**.
(Who we are, what we've done, why the activity/program/strategy should continue/what the prospect can do to make it continue)
5. The collaborative has **successfully spun off strategy/program/activity**.

Process: See Benchmark I for self-assessment and action planning process.

Benchmark IV: Fund Development

A collaborative successful at this sustainability strategy has raised funds to sustain its activities and/or the collaborative itself as an ongoing infrastructure to improve health and well-being. It has attracted resources to sustain this infrastructure or is moving toward incorporation to do the same.

Criteria:

1. The collaborative and a mobilized citizenry have **identified prospects**.

EXAMPLES

Local government budgets
Local community foundations
County Children and Families Commission (Prop 10)
Blended local agency funding
State and/or national foundations
State agencies
Private Donations
Endowments
Associations (Chambers of Commerce, Interfaith Councils)
Private business

2. The collaborative has **built relationships with prospects**.
3. The collaborative has **gained commitments for present work**.
4. The collaborative has **built a case for ongoing support**
(Who we are, what we've done, what we've accomplished, what we need)
5. The collaborative has **gained support**.
6. If the collaborative is considering **incorporation as a sustainability strategy**,
 - a. Has the collaborative **researched incorporation** for feasibility?
 - b. Has the collaborative **taken steps to incorporate**?

Process: See Benchmark I for self-assessment and action planning process.

Collaborative Sustainability Assessment

Recording Guidelines

1. Use three flipcharts side by side.
2. Facilitator records strengths while facilitating discussion
3. Recorder records Challenges as they come up
4. When strengths and challenges are named, record the Action and the name of the person willing to take the Lead.

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES	ACTION/LEAD

Rationale:

The purpose of doing the Sustainability Assessment as a facilitated conversation is to come up with specific evidence that demonstrates success in the components or benchmarks of the assessment.

For example, a key question of Benchmark #1 asks:

How has your collaborative identified the gifts, talents, skills and capacities of community residents?

Responses will be in the form of specific evidence such as: “We have conducted capacity inventories at each of our events.” This would be evidence. We record it as a **STRENGTH**.

In this conversation style, the free flow of ideas may result in participants naming difficulties the collaborative is having in this area. An example of this kind of response would be: “You know, we haven’t done enough about matching people’s skills with opportunities to participate in collaborative activities.” We record this as a **CHALLENGE**.

Because we always want to build on our strengths to overcome our challenges, recording these simultaneously facilitates the next level of discussion, which is **ACTION**.

We record an Action and ask for a person who is willing to take the **LEAD** to move this action forward.

Action	Lead	Timeline

ACTION PLANNING GRID: Answers the Questions, Who will Do What by When

Note: A more elaborate action plan would also include resources that you already have, resources that you need and outcomes.