

MOVING FORWARD:



Tips for Program Sustainability

What is Sustainability?

“Sustainability” refers to the continuation of a project’s goals, principles, and efforts to achieve desired outcomes. Although many grantees think that guaranteeing the sustainability of a project means finding the resources to continue it “as is” beyond the grant period, ensuring sustainability really means making sure that the goals of the project continue to be met through activities that are consistent with the current conditions and workforce development needs of the region, including the needs of both workers and industry.

Grantees are reminded that the expenditure of any grant funds on activities related to sustainability and sustainability planning must be consistent with the grantee’s statement of work, and in accordance with all relevant rules and regulations that apply to their grants. When expending grant funds on activities related to sustainability and sustainability planning, grantees are reminded that they must adhere to Federal rules and regulations on outreach, fund raising, lobbying, and all other relevant and applicable rules and regulations.

Start Thinking About Sustainability Now

Thinking about sustainability is not something that should be left until your grant is coming to an end. You will need time to:

- Identify short-term and long-term sustainability strategies that will work for your organization.
- Conduct an assessment of your current project, and use the data collected on the performance of your grant to help you determine specific activities that can and should be continued, any additional labor pools to focus on, and the desired scale of activities that you want to sustain.
- Conduct a planning process for sustainability.
- Identify what resources are needed to sustain your project (e.g. faculty, staff, equipment, space, etc.) and work toward obtaining them.

SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIES

Sustainability strategies that you may want to pursue include:

- Establish a formal or informal group to address sustainability—do this early!
- Write out what your vision and goals for the project are, and consider if you want to make any changes.
- Look at how you expect to fund sustainability, considering the preferences, needs, and desired outcomes.



- Develop buy-in among your strategic partners for the aspects of your project that you plan to sustain, especially those partners that provided leveraged resources during the life of your grant or are likely to provide leveraged resources in the future.
- Market the idea, both internally, within your company/organization, and externally, to your colleagues, strategic partners, board members, industry associations, and other state or national organizations of which you may be a part. Conducting a SWOT analysis of your environment may help you determine the best channels through which to market.

Develop a Sustainability Plan

As worthy as your project may be, it is not going to sustain itself. You need to plan your effort carefully and then systematically undertake the appropriate steps. These include:

- **Base your decisions on data, to the extent that you can.** A good starting point are your quarterly performance reports. An assessment of your project's current and past performance can allow project staff and partners to make informed decisions when planning sustainability.
- **Specify whom you want to serve.** Identify whether the activities will be available to all or focused on one or more specific groups such as dislocated workers, incumbent workers, or youth. This will help in determining additional project funding sources.
- **Develop a detailed description of what services and activities you want to sustain.** Which ones will be maintained? Which ones will change? You do not have to sustain all of your activities, just the ones that are intended to achieve your desired outcomes. You may even want to add some new activities.
- **Identify what you need to manage and operate the activities you have selected.** Once the project activities have been established, you may decide that either a smaller or larger commitment of management resources within your organization is necessary.
- **Are current and potential partners and other stakeholders aware of your sustainability planning activities?** Include dissemination about your project in both your planning and your budget.
- **Find champions** – organizations and interest groups – that benefit from your project's activities or who are interested in the target groups you are serving can be great allies!

KEY STEPS IN THE SUSTAINABILITY PLANNING PROCESS

1. Clarify your vision
2. Determine what you want to sustain
3. Build collaboration
4. Choose your desired sustainability strategies and methods
5. Develop action steps for sustainability
6. Document and communicate your sustainability successes

Sustainability Tips

Take sustainability seriously – Don't assume that if the idea is good it will automatically attract future support. Sustainability must be planned.

Set clear and realistic expectations – What do you hope to sustain? What makes the most sense?

Build capacity – Consider whether or not to build the capacity of your organization in order to foster sustainability, such as developing new training activities that meet the workforce and industry demands in your local or regional area, or increasing the number of faculty, staff, or training courses currently offered.

Consider ways to institutionalize, or incorporate all or some part of the effort into existing, ongoing organizational or community operations, rather than continuing it as a separate project.

Collaborate with partners – on an ongoing basis. Make sure your partners realize the benefit of participating in your project, are kept up to date on how the project is doing, and feel involved. Build into the project design a role for partners in developing and implementing the sustainability plan.

Document and evaluate outputs and outcomes as marketing tools – Produce data and reports that can be used as tools to explain the initiative's mission and successes and to serve as outreach tools to garner further support. Toot your own horn as you go along. Don't wait until the end of the grant to get the word out about your successes.

Actively pursue the resources needed to ensure sustainability – Make sure specific staff members are tasked with pursuing needed resources. If possible, assemble a team to identify public and private resources that best align with what you wish to sustain, as well as any issues or challenges that may need to be addressed in order to successfully pursue those resources.

Look at what others have done to sustain their projects – Visit www.workforcegps.org, to access High Growth and Community-Based grantee solutions. These solutions include curriculum, competency models, distance learning tools, career awareness and outreach materials, research findings, case studies, career lattices, web sites, and more! You can search and download all of the solutions for free on workforcegps.org. Look at what other projects have done to see how they have sustained themselves and see what ideas might be adaptable to your project.