



Sustainability Planning Checklist

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I. KEYS TO SUSTAINABILITY

Sustaining your community school initiative is not simply about generating new grant dollars; that is obviously an important piece of the puzzle, but if that is all your plan indicates we believe you will be missing the mark.

Sustaining community schools involves building a constituency and creating a common vision and strategy. Schools, community-based organizations, United Ways, government, agencies, community groups, business religious and other sectors seeking to work collaboratively to connect schools and community resources should ask the question:

How can we use existing resources (or resources that might become available) to support our vision?

By working together, you should already have a multitude of supporters and funders for your community schools initiative.

Finally, sustainability is much more art than science, as much political as programmatic.

A recent analysis of school-community initiatives identified two primary keys to sustainability: **leadership** and **money**.

- ◆ **Leadership** provides fuel and direction. Initiatives that last are led by people who know where they want to go, and have the position, personality and power to make others want to come along.
- ◆ **Money** buys time. It ensures that new efforts are large enough to attract attention and last long enough to build constituency. Money can come by using existing resources differently and more effectively; but additional funding is necessary to create a stable infrastructure for the future.

Several factors related to leadership and money contribute to sustainability:

- ◆ **Diversified Funding:** Successful sites often:
 - Have a source of core support for program management and key programs,
 - Tap into major funding streams (e.g., Title I, Medicaid, Child Care Block Grant) and

- Use grant writing, fee for service income and local fund raising activities to help make up the difference.

When the political environment is ready, they may seek direct support from state and local governments, and in some cases directly from the voters.

- ◆ **Careful Site Selection:** Initiatives have a better chance of lasting when sites are chosen carefully and given an opportunity to develop leadership and capacity to meet the initiatives expectations.
- ◆ **Visibility and Organized Constituent Support:** Visibility is the best form of outreach and the first step in building a strong constituency. Initiatives that survive embrace their role as advocates. They demonstrate that they are making a difference every day. The organized and vocal support of constituents is a key factor in keeping child and family issues on the community's agenda.

II. QUESTIONS TO ASK

PROGRAM AND BUDGET INFORMATION

1. Vision:

- ◆ Is there a clear, compelling vision for what you are doing?
- ◆ Is it well-understood by:
 - Program staff?
 - Policymakers?
 - Public?

2. Results:

- ◆ Are there measurable results for the initiative that help to make the case to policymakers and the public?
- ◆ Is there a strategy in place to collect results data?

3. Budget:

- ◆ Is there a sustainability budget available?
- ◆ Does the budget define:
 - Costs to sustain the present effort?
 - Costs at an individual school?
 - Costs for managing the effort at the community and the school site level?

CONSTITUENCY BUILDING AND COMMUNICATIONS

1. Champions:

- ◆ Does the program have champions who will speak for its value and importance to children, families and the community?
- ◆ Is the governance group "champion-ing" the initiative?
- ◆ What other champions do you have or could you cultivate?

- Superintendent of Schools
- Local Elected Officials
- Business leaders
- Religious leaders
- Neighborhood and civic leaders
- Local foundation leaders
- School Principals
- CBO Leaders
- United Way Leaders
- Others

- ◆ Is there a conscious strategy in place to engage and support champions?

2. Local Elected Officials:

- ◆ Are local elected officials, individually and as a group, aware of the initiative?
How you make them more supportive?
- ◆ Have you reached out to:
 - School Boards
 - Mayor
 - City Council
 - County Executives
 - County Council
 - State Legislators
 - Congressmen
 - Senators

3. Youth, Parents and Neighborhood Residents:

- ◆ Is there a strategy in place to create a voice for these groups in support of the initiative?
- ◆ Are there potential leaders on your governance board or site teams?
- ◆ Have you helped them develop their public speaking and advocacy skills?

4. Communications:

- ◆ Is there a strategy in place to communicate your work to the key stakeholders and the public?
- ◆ Do you keep key stakeholders up to date through a simple newsletter or via email?
- ◆ Is the local media (print and broadcast) aware of the initiative?
- ◆ Have you discussed the initiative with the editorial board of your newspaper?

5. Collaborative Advocacy:

- ◆ Do you have working relationships with other related initiatives and collaboratives, advocacy groups and related organizations that will support your sustainability efforts, and whose work you can support?

III. FUNDING

1. School District:

- ◆ Is the school district looking at its resources to determine how they might be most effectively integrated into the initiative?
- ◆ Have you mapped other child, youth and family programs operated by, or funded through the school district that might be more effective and efficient if operated in alliance with the school-community initiative?
- ◆ How can funding sources from Title I, Safe and Drug Free Schools and other sources support the school-community initiative?

B. Human Services and Youth Development Organizations:

- ◆ Are these organizations thinking about how their programs and services might be delivered more effectively in the context of a school-community initiative?

C. Special Funding Sources:

- ◆ Has the initiative been able to tap funding streams such as Medicaid Administrative Claiming or Title IV-E emergency assistance reimbursements?

D. United Way:

- ◆ What commitment has the United Way made to sustain the initiative?

E. New Funding Streams:

- ◆ How can the initiative play a role in generating new sources of funds? Possible sources include:
 - Tobacco settlement revenue (state level) that will increase in coming years.
 - State legislation for community schools, after school programs, youth violence prevention programs, or other services that might be offered in a community-school context.
 - Local taxing strategy.

F. Joint Planning:

- ◆ Is there a place in the community where funders from various sources come together to set priorities, plan and pool resources for major community initiatives?