



INFORMATION SHEET 4.1

Keys to Sustainability

Sustainability is the process of an effective system achieving and maintaining desired long-term results.¹

A Parable of Sustainability

A horse is used to transport goods from one town to another. However, the horse dies. Here are some of the strategies the town uses to solve this dilemma:

- *Appoint a committee to study the horse.*
- *Provide additional funding and/or training to increase the dead horse's performance.*
- *Arrange to visit other countries to see how other cultures ride dead horses.*
- *Lower the standards so that dead horses can be included.*
- *Reclassify the dead horse as living-impaired.*
- *Hire outside contractors to ride the dead horse.*
- *Harness several dead horses together to increase speed.*
- *Do a productivity study to see if lighter riders would improve the dead horse's performance.*
- *Declare that as the dead horse does not have to be fed, it is less costly, carries lower overhead and therefore contributes substantially more to the bottom line of the economy than do some other horses.*
- *Rewrite the expected performance requirements for all horses.*

The town had lost sight of the fact that the horse was a means to the end; it was just one way—one strategy—for getting the goods from one town to another. (Author unknown)

It is easy for organizations, task forces, and communities to become attached to the activities and interventions that they are implementing. However, if those interventions aren't achieving the outcomes, then sustaining them (just like trying to work with a dead horse) won't get you what you want. Sustainability is not about sustaining interventions; it's about achieving and sustaining positive outcomes—improved health and wellness or a reduction in substance abuse and other related problems.

Keys to Sustainability

Sustaining effective behavioral health promotion and prevention efforts requires ongoing attention to a number of key elements which are integrated into the steps of the SPF:²

- Build community support
- Enhance organizational capacity



- Ensure effectiveness

Build Community Support

Cultivating community support for prevention and behavioral health promotion and the positive outcomes they achieve is built on the success of organizational efforts to collaborate. Community support can be built by:³

- Encouraging community ownership through positive relationship building and collaboration
- Celebrating promotion/prevention successes and accomplishments in public and through social media
- Developing community promotion/prevention leaders and champions, and connecting to other prevention efforts locally, regionally, and statewide

Enhance Organizational Capacity

Assuring that community agencies, organizations, and institutions have adequate internal organizational capacity to achieve positive outcomes involves exploring the answers to a number of questions:⁴

- Do organizations have strong administrative structures that will allow them to be competitive for grants and other opportunities?
- Are there formal linkages, such as memoranda of understanding (MOUs), with key partners? Do partners share equal responsibility for addressing community issues?
- Do partnering organizations have resources and expertise they are willing to share?

Ensure Effectiveness

Effectiveness is more than just using evidence-based interventions. Effectiveness depends on making sure the logic model lines up in the following ways:⁵

- Interventions are aligned with the problem and risk factor, and have sufficient reach.
- Evidence-based practices that are a good fit conceptually and practically are used.
- The implementation is high quality, and includes buy-in from the community, administrative support, and adequate training for staff to do the intervention.
- The evaluation plan provides ongoing process and outcome data so improvements can be made as needed.