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National Association of County & City Health Officials

The National Connection for Local Public Health



Sustainability Planning Guide for Healthy Communities: A Summary



Introduction

The following document is a summary of *A Sustainability Planning Guide for Healthy Communities* (Sustainability Guide), developed and distributed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 2011. It is designed to help coalitions, community leaders, and other public health professionals develop, implement, and evaluate plans to sustain their public health efforts. A synthesis of science- and practice-based evidence, the guide aims to build community capacity to work in partnership to identify and address public health challenges so that resulting health initiatives can have lasting impact. The guide introduces key sustainability approaches, including policies, partnerships, organizational strategies, and communication plans, provides a process for sustaining policy strategies and related activities, and demonstrates sustainability planning in action with real-life examples.

Sustainability: A community's ongoing capacity and resolve to work together to establish, advance, and maintain effective strategies that continuously improve health and quality of life for all.

Sustainability involves more than just funding. Sustainability focuses on creating momentum to maintain community-wide change by maximizing community assets and resources; it also means institutionalizing policies and practices within communities and organizations. In addition to advancing public health goals, sustainability should also address social justice issues and socioeconomic disparities. From the outset, sustainability requires an approach that emphasizes the development of a network of community practitioners who understand and can lead a movement. Sustainability also requires involving multiple stakeholders who can develop long-term support throughout the community for a coalition's efforts. These elements of sustainability are crucial to ensuring lasting change through solid public health programs and initiatives.

Strengthening and sustaining a coalition's infrastructure, in order to support policy strategies that lead to healthier communities, is vital. Flexibility and adaptability are hallmarks of sustainable initiatives. Sustainability is a complex goal and requires a multifaceted approach that reaches across all sectors of the community.

Ultimately, sustaining a coalition requires a broad perspective and a holistic view of the community as an interrelated entity.

Successful sustainability requires the following:

- Support from key decision-makers and community volunteers;
- Sufficient leadership, funding, and channels of communications; and
- Procedures in place to monitor policy results (e.g., city ordinances) and modify strategies accordingly.

Coalitions also need to demonstrate accomplishments:

- Create a long-term plan for ensuring the viability of the coalition or initiative;
- Develop a diverse funding portfolio, collaborative leadership, and marketing and branding strategies; and
- Ensure that all community stakeholders are ready to respond to a changing environment.

The following summary outlines the CDC's Sustainability Guide, highlighting the important functions and processes of coalition sustainability and capacity building. Coupled with the Sustainability Guide summary, the Center for Civic Partnerships has provided a 10-step outline for maintaining community improvements. This 10-step outline can be found at www.civicpartnerships.org/docs/tools_resources/sustainability.htm and has also been summarized on page 10 of this document.



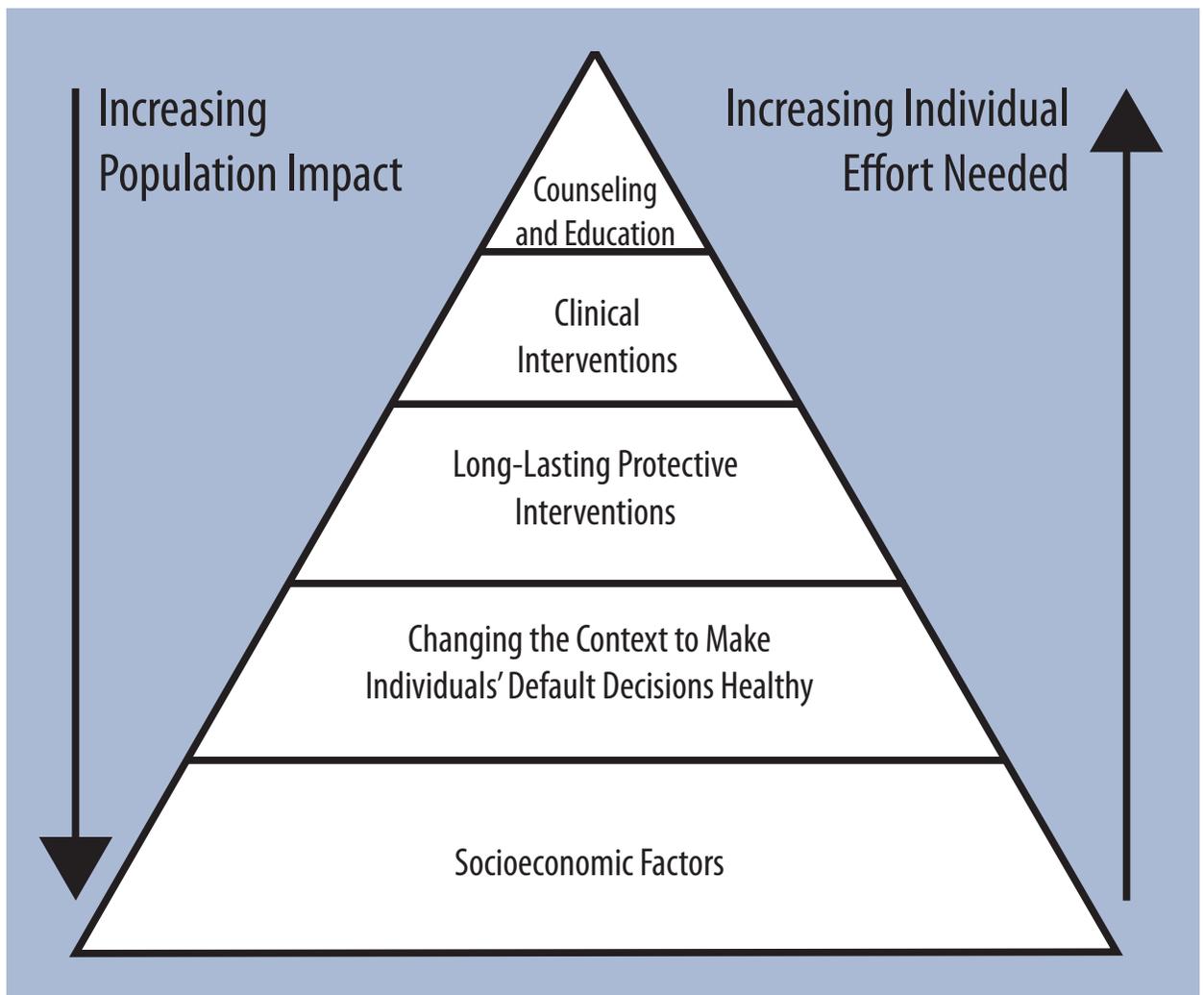
Policy, Systems, and Environmental Change Strategies

To increase systemic community change with regard to public health, coalitions need to go beyond individual behavior change and employ multilevel policy, systems, and environmental change (PSE) strategies.

Policies are important for sustainability and help achieve results in the following ways:

- Provide long-term goals around which community members can rally;
- Serve as an effective way to promote long-term momentum;
- Support individual behavior change by changing the environment around the individual, including social norms and values;
- Have the potential to impact far more people than individual strategies; and
- May be more economically sustainable than other approaches.¹

The five-tiered health impact pyramid that follows, created by CDC Director Dr. Thomas Frieden, demonstrates varying levels of impact that PSE strategies can have on health. At the base of the pyramid, indicating interventions with the greatest potential impact, are efforts to address the socioeconomic determinants of health. In ascending order are interventions that diminish in population impact while also increasing the individual effort needed to implement and sustain them. Interventions focusing on lower levels of the pyramid tend to be more effective because they reach broader segments of society. Implementing interventions at each of the levels can achieve the maximum possible sustained public health benefit.²



Four Elements for Creating Local Policy

Local policy can be a powerful tool, potentially empowering a community to make changes that adequately address particular needs or issues. These four elements outline the basic steps in creating local policy:

- 1 Assess the policy landscape and select a policy objective.** When creating local policy, a coalition should be sure to do the following:
 - Understand the policy landscape, which includes local health departments, community institutions, community-based organizations, and public opinion;
 - Use knowledge to steer coalitions toward selecting a narrowly focused policy or making progress on multiple policy fronts;
 - Research recent policy activity and evaluate whether administrative or legislative action is needed;
 - Determine which level of local government has jurisdictional responsibility for the types of policy being considered;
 - Identify key decision-makers; and
 - Identify specific policy objectives informed by the political landscape.

- 2 Develop a strong base of support.** Developing a base of support can help policymakers define strengths and assets within their community. These entities can provide support as the coalition advances their policy efforts.

In order to develop a strong base of support, coalitions should do the following:

- Identify supporters;
- Recruit an influential official to help build rapport with other officials; and
- Understand the potential opponents of the initiative.

- 3 Support the case for implementation.** Creating a successful policy or policy change requires much more than simply knowing the facts about a particular issue. A coalition needs to prepare a well-framed case, substantiate it with solid data and persuasive information, and communicate its case clearly and thoughtfully.

When supporting the case for implementation, coalitions should do the following:

- Conduct research to back up their case;
- Calculate cost and savings;
- Use media advocacy to educate the public and decision-makers; and
- Consider the opposition and prepare counter-arguments.

- 4 Plan for policy implementation, monitoring, and enforcement.** Adequate planning is required to implement, monitor, and enforce policy in order to sustain policy change. Policy should be designed and implemented to achieve equitable health outcomes.

When planning for policy implementation, monitoring, and enforcement, coalitions should do the following:

- Ensure that implementation of the policy is feasible;
- Determine the monitoring and enforcement mechanisms;
- Create a plan to evaluate the policy; and
- Disseminate the results of the evaluation process.

Coalitions and partnerships are important for sustainability.

Coalitions promote sustainability by providing a platform and process that facilitate support from participating community organizations and leaders.

To this end, coalitions and partnerships can do the following:

- Serve as effective vehicles for exchanging knowledge and ideas;
- Limit duplication of strategies and services;
- Help achieve population-level policy changes by focusing on multiple strategies with sufficient scale and scope;
- Demonstrate and develop community support for issues;
- Empower and develop community capacity to address prevention and health issues;
- Maximize the talents and resources of individuals and groups through collective action;
- Improve trust, communication, and collaboration among community agencies and sectors;
- Change community norms and standards concerning health risk behaviors; and
- Promote policies to create sustainable change in systems and environments.

Key Sustainability Tasks for Coalitions	
Stage of Development	Tasks
Formation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build community ownership. • Assess community needs and assets. • Develop commitment for vision, mission, goals, and objectives. • Create viable organizational structure. • Recruit key organizational members. • Build leadership team.
Maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain member commitment and participation to achieve objectives. • Obtain and share member resources. • Continue to assess community assets and needs. • Plan and implement effective PSEs.
Institutionalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversify and strengthen coalition's financial base. • Ensure Community Home* for ongoing efforts. • Plan for leadership succession. • Institutionalize strategies within member organizations and community institutions.
<p>* Community Home is a base of operations that can serve as an objective broker of public health resources, or as a solicitor or administrator of a variety of funding sources. See Module 3, "Establishing a Home for Healthy Communities Work," on page 60.</p>	

Building coalition members' skills is important for sustainability.

Skill-building accomplishes the following:

- Assists in motivating members to sustain their partnership;
- Creates new connections and networks in the community;
- Exposes coalition members to new skills and information, which in turn helps coalition members improve their ability to work on multiple levels, such as individual, inter-organizational, intra-organizational, community, and policy; and
- Supports learning and training infrastructure, whether through workshops, one-on-one training, or other means, to provide long-term benefits to coalition members, and help sustain the efforts of the coalition itself.

Communication strategies are important for sustainability because they can achieve the following:

- Develop public and decision-maker awareness and support around policy strategies and keep individuals informed of the efforts; and
- Encourage active participation of coalition members by keeping everyone informed and involved.

Specifically, media efforts can help in the following ways:

- Promote decision-maker support for coalition vision, mission, and plans;
- Convey the sense that coalition funds and other resources are being used wisely;
- Increase chances that new funding or other resource development opportunities will present themselves; and
- Set the stage for collaboration or coordination between organizations.

Communication strategies are important to sustainability. The way a message is sent can be as important as the content of that message itself.³ For more information on crafting communication strategies, see the Smart Chart Tool 3.0 at www.smartchart.org/content/smart_chart_3_0.pdf and CDC's *Media Access Guide: A Resource for Community Health Promotion* at www.cdc.gov/healthycommunitiesprogram/tools/pdf/mediaaccessguide.pdf.

Social marketing strategies are important for sustainability because they are able to do the following:

- Generate discussion;
- Promote information, attitudes, and values conducive to long-term behavioral changes in certain populations;
- Contribute to policy changes within a community by influencing behavior in individuals; and
- Influence entire communities.

To plan and implement an integrated social marketing strategy, coalitions should refer to the “Four Ps of Marketing.”⁴

Four Ps of Marketing	
Four Ps of Marketing	Explanation
Product/Needs	Product is designed to appeal to perceived needs of individuals/groups.
Price (total cost)	Perceived value of product (e.g., better than alternatives, public good, increased visibility/influence, financial gain) exceeds cost.
Place/Accessibility	Product is easy to obtain or pervasive in society.
Promotion or Communication	Processes that make people aware of price-value/cost cap through advertising, public relations, or personal selling.

Example:⁴

Four Ps of Marketing for Unhealthy and Healthy Behaviors		
Part	Commercial Strategy Examples	Public Health Strategy Examples
Product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designed to appeal to perceived needs of individuals/groups (e.g., nicotine in tobacco, caffeine and sugar in soft drinks, fat in fast food). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design products with clear warning labels/designs that reduce positive mental imagery. • Create attractive, fun, and safe environments for physical activity.
Price	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep unhealthy food and beverages affordable. • Produce low-cost generic cigarettes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taxes on unhealthy products and incentives for healthy eating, physical activity, or tobacco cessation.
Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make product easy to purchase (e.g., placing products in a prominent area in a store). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make the healthy choice the easy choice (e.g., create physical activity opportunities accessible through location or safe, affordable transportation).
Promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use image promotion as advertising strategy; associate products with fitness, social acceptance, and fun (e.g., toys in meal packs). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associate behaviors, health opportunities using similar approach with billboards, earned media, financial incentives, and messages from leaders or other prominent figures.



Conclusion

Coalitions have been a particularly powerful and effective tool for mobilizing and empowering communities to make changes to improve public health. Sustaining coalition efforts is an essential component to achieving public health goals. Focusing on the themes outlined in this summary will help coalitions, community leaders, public health professionals, and community organizations build upon their successes as they work towards sustaining and increasing improvements in public health.

For more information, please access the following resources:

- The CDC's *A Sustainability Planning Guide for Healthy Communities*, available at www.cdc.gov/healthycommunitiesprogram/pdf/sustainability_guide.pdf
- The Center for Civic Partnerships' "Sustainability Tools—10 Steps to Maintaining Your Community Improvements," available at www.civicpartnerships.org/docs/tools_resources/sustainability.htm

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Sustainability Toolkit—10 Steps to Maintaining Your Community Improvements

The following is a summary of the Center for Civic Partnership’s “10 Steps for Maintaining Your Community Improvements,” which is included in the CDC’s Sustainability Guide. These 10 steps focus on providing coalitions or planning groups with the necessary steps to develop a sustainability plan. This process is presented in 10 sequential steps that integrate the issue of building capacity for operational purposes with the goal of prioritizing and implementing policies.

Parts of the steps, or all of the 10 steps, can be applied to determine how to organize the community and the coalition in order to successfully carry out priority strategies in the long run. The full document, which includes activities and examples explaining each step, can be found at www.civicpartnerships.org/docs/publications/sustainability_toolkit.htm.

STEP 1—CREATE A SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF SUSTAINABILITY

Think about this step as part of your core efforts. Successful long-term planning depends upon a clear picture of a long-term mission and vision that includes aspects of your coalition’s structure or policy strategies that should be maintained or improved.¹ Consider expanding your definition of sustainability to include the efforts of like-minded partners and organizations in the community; what you hope to accomplish may be work they are already doing.

STEP 2—CREATE A PLAN TO WORK THROUGH THE PROCESS

Consider whom your coalition or planning group needs in order to carry out the plan. In moving forward, consider assigning a coordinator, a facilitator, and a planning team, whose functions are outlined below.

Coordinator: The coordinator helps to ensure that the sustainability planning timeline is realistic, the appropriate people are involved and engaged in the process, meetings occur as planned, internal and external communications are effective, and action steps are implemented.

Facilitator: Consider contracting with an outside facilitator to lead some planning meetings. Some points in this process (e.g., Steps 6 and 8) require difficult decisions, such as de-prioritizing a policy strategy that a member of the planning group values, reducing staffing levels, or working through a challenging political situation. Using an outside (and potentially more

objective) facilitator may help reduce conflict and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate.

Planning Team: Forming a separate planning team focused on sustainability allows the coalition to focus on policy strategies already underway for sustaining change in systems and environments and capacity-building efforts.² This team should be responsible for discussing relevant issues, making decisions, and ultimately implementing the sustainability plan.

In creating a work plan, consider who the internal stakeholders are and how to involve them in the process. Map out how much time to allot for each step of the process.

In challenging economic times, acknowledging and addressing the challenges of limited resources and staff time is important. Consider creative ways to maximize resources and find ways to build in dedicated staff time for coalition efforts.

STEP 3—POSITION COALITION EFFORTS TO INCREASE THE ODDS OF SUSTAINABILITY

Identify what your coalition is already doing to plan for sustainability. Think about current and future goals and factors such as infrastructure, operational practices, and financial resources needed to support those goals. Also, assess existing partner relationships that support coalition efforts and identify new partnerships to develop.

STEP 4—EXAMINE THE CURRENT PICTURE AND PENDING ITEMS

List all of your coalition's efforts and note any upcoming events that can impact the continuation of those efforts. It may also be helpful to list other community efforts that can complement or reinforce your coalition's strategies and activities. Finally, discuss how all these factors influence the current organizational structure and the potential for achieving future policy strategies, goals, objectives, or activities. This analysis can help your coalition leverage funding and partnerships, which, in turn, increases sustainability.

STEP 5—DEVELOP CRITERIA TO HELP DETERMINE WHICH EFFORTS TO CONTINUE

Develop criteria to help the coalition determine which activities are priorities and which activities should be discontinued. Consider your coalition's mission and vision, how the group is structured and supported, and the long-term goal of each of your policy efforts. The Sustainability Planning Team should agree on criteria that will help determine the value-added benefit of each effort and select efforts for which data are available. It is also important to ensure a direct relationship between coalition goals and the supporting objectives and activities and to evaluate progress and outcomes. Routinely re-evaluate the priorities and continuation of activities.

STEP 6—DECIDE WHAT TO CONTINUE AND PRIORITIZE (AND WHAT CAN BE REVISED FOR INCREASED SUCCESS OR DISCONTINUED)

Once your coalition or planning group has developed criteria, decide which efforts to continue and prioritize and which efforts to revise or discontinue. This process will help your coalition or planning group provide adequate support to priority issues.

STEP 7—CREATE OPTIONS FOR MAINTAINING PRIORITY EFFORTS

After prioritizing strategies, think creatively about resource development and leveraging funding sources. Continuing an initiative does not necessarily mean that it cannot be adjusted or modified; explore many options to ensure success.

STEP 8—DEVELOP A SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

Developing a plan is a critical part of the sustainability process. A plan can help your coalition accomplish the following:

- Obtain input and support from coalition members and key external decision-makers.
- Define critical long-term and short-term policy strategies.
- Create an organizational plan to attract and make the best use of human, financial, and in-kind resources for implementing the strategies.
- Document and organize the information you have collected: evaluation findings, lists of strategies and activities, criteria grids, effort justification sheets, budgets, and more.
- Consider the plan a living document that can be revised as situations and funding streams change. Make the plan as concise as possible and include an appendix with items documenting the entire planning process. These can help maintain institutional memory that will, in turn, help future planning efforts replicate successes and avoid mistakes. Be prepared for requests for this backup documentation. Consider creating a plan for two different audiences: (1) a full sustainability plan targeting the coalition; and (2) a brief overview to share with outside parties.

STEP 9—IMPLEMENT THE SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

Before full implementation, create action plans for each organizational and policy strategy to include steps to ensure the presence of supporting organizational structures and processes for fiscal agent practices, resource development roles, and conflict resolution protocols.

To keep people involved and engaged, continuously recruit new members/staff and develop leaders to help with transition, meet with participants to discuss whether their needs are being met, provide periodic training (via conference calls, workshops, webinars, etc.), and use communication vehicles (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, newsletters, periodic reports, presentations) to keep members motivated and informed. Also, use media, marketing, and networking to secure resources the coalition needs for sustaining community health improvements.

STEP 10—EVALUATE OUTCOMES AND REVISE AS NEEDED

Evaluating outcomes is essential in order to determine both the nature and extent of the intended goal.

Evaluating outcomes can also provide the coalition or planning group with the ability to demonstrate its successes in meaningful and objective ways while setting the stage for future plans and goals. If the evaluation reveals specific flaws or issues, the initial plan can be revised and efforts can be either re-attempted or continued.

Source

Center for Civic Partnerships. (2010). Sustainability toolkit: 10 steps to maintaining your community improvements, 2nd edition. Sacramento, CA: Public Health Institute. For more information, visit www.civicpartnerships.org/docs/publications/sustainability_toolkit.htm.

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