



Planning for Program Sustainability Tip Sheet





Sustainability practices help ensure programs persist and succeed in the long term. These practices can help organizations continue their impactful work after funding periods end. Previous AmeriCorps-funded programs have demonstrated that efforts toward financial and nonfinancial sustainability require ongoing planning and collaboration. See the “About This Tip Sheet” box for more information.

This tip sheet defines sustainability, offers recommendations for when to plan for sustainability, and provides best practices for implementing sustainability efforts.

Defining Sustainability

Organizations can approach sustaining their programs in a variety of ways. For example, they can continue to implement their program in the future as it was implemented at inception (programmatic sustainability). They can identify program elements and weave them into the organization’s daily practices (organizational sustainability). Programs may also embed their services in existing external systems (systems and policy sustainability). Regardless of how organizations plan to sustain their programs, they need to consider the financial and nonfinancial strategies they will implement to sustain them.

Financial sustainability strategies can include:

 Seeking additional grant funding	 Incorporating into organizational budget	 Generating revenue with new payment models	 Providing more cost-effective services
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Nonfinancial sustainability strategies can include:

 Improving data collection and analysis	 Building evidence	 Expanding leadership capacity	 Collaborating with partners	 Scaling the work
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What your organization can do:

- Identify one or more sustainability approaches to pursue: Continue a program, weave elements of a program into the organization, and/or embed program services in current systems.
- Plan for financial sustainability: Develop a pipeline of funding, set aside additional organizational funding, find efficiencies, and/or implement revenue-generating models.
- Plan for nonfinancial sustainability: Improve data collection, build evidence, expand leadership capacity, collaborate, and scale.

When to Plan for Sustainability

Sustainability planning should begin at program launch or the submission of a grant proposal. Implementers should develop program sustainability indicators, establish best practices for reaching data goals, and use networks to identify potential future grantors throughout implementation.

What your organization can do:

- Establish pre-award or early indicators of organizational capacity to sustain the work. Revisit these indicators to ensure their accuracy as predictors of sustainability.
- Plan early by setting sustainability goals and milestones, sharing best practices, and identifying partnership opportunities and data needs.
- Plan from the outset for long-term funding and build a pipeline of potential funders or other revenue sources.

Using Evaluation and Evidence to Support Sustainability

Rigorous evaluation practices and a growing evidence base can demonstrate the value of a well-resourced program continuing into the future. Continuous evaluation help organizations validate their programs' effectiveness and implement cost-effective improvements to support sustainability. Organizations can also use this information to make informed decisions about which program elements should be sustained and demonstrate their impact to other organizations, policymakers, and/or potential funders.

What your organization can do:

- Analyze outcomes to identify evidence of effectiveness. Reevaluate whether to sustain elements that lack evidence of positive outcomes.
- Embed expertise acquired—such as evaluation skills—into practices within the implementing organization to produce more rigorous results that will make the case for sustaining programming demonstrated to be effective.
- Identify stand-alone services proven to be effective and embed them within the organization's programming to ensure they become integral elements of the organization's activities.
- Implement programmatic changes and organizational efficiencies to deliver services in a more effective and/or cost-efficient way.
- Demonstrate the benefits of proven practices and encourage their implementation at the policy level and by other organizations.

Collaborating with Partners

Established relationships with a variety of partners are critical for sustaining work. Engaging other interested parties can be part of a long-term strategy to help ensure uninterrupted service delivery. The benefits of these collaborations include fundraising assistance, service delivery and continuation on behalf of partners, and enhancing best practices for sustainable programming through partner support.

What your organization can do:

- Build relationships with partners, peers, service providers, and the local community to garner buy-in and support for sustaining the work, whether through partnership with a community-based organization or through a network of collaborating organizations.
- Link demonstrably successful elements of a program to other programs and services within and across organizations to broaden and sustain service provision.
- Identify formal and informal opportunities to engage with peers and share best practices to increase the financial, programmatic, and organizational capacity needed to sustain the work.

About the Office of Research and Evaluation

The [AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation](#) assists AmeriCorps and its partners in collecting, analyzing, and disseminating data and insights about AmeriCorps programs and civic life in America.

About AmeriCorps

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About This Tip Sheet

This tip sheet was based on research sponsored by the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation that collected data from five grantees and two subgrantees from the Social Innovation Fund (SIF). The [SIF issue brief](#) was originally developed by ICF (authored by Lara Malakoff and Janet Pershing) and published in 2017 as a deliverable of the SIF Classic National Assessment and synthesized for this document. If you have any questions, please reach out to evaluation@cns.gov.