Sustaining Community-Based Programs: Relationships Between Sustainability Factors and Program Results

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Introduction and Purpose

- Community-based programs important components of service delivery to at-risk families
- Despite prevalence of these programs, relatively little information on elements of sustainability
  - Data suggest many of them are not sustained once initial start-up funding is exhausted
- What are primary elements of program sustainability?
- How do these elements relate to sustainability planning, confidence in program survival, and meeting the needs of at-risk families?
A Matter of Responsibility

“We have a responsibility to our program recipients; they’ve had so many losses in their lives and for us to come in for a year or two or three and give them hope, only to have the program go away, we’ve just caused another loss and a further loss of hope in their lives” (Akerlund, 2000).

Marek and Mancini (2005)
Model of Sustainability

SUSTAINABILITY ELEMENTS:
- Leadership competence
- Effective collaboration
- Understanding the community
- Demonstrated program results
- Strategic funding
- Staff involvement and integration
- Program responsivity

MIDDLE RANGE PROGRAM RESULTS:
- Participant needs met
- Confidence in program survival
- Effective sustainability planning
- Other program results

ULTIMATE RESULT: Sustainability

Marek and Mancini (2005)
Sustainability: What Does it Look Like?
Marek & Mancini, 2005

- Strategic Funding
- Leadership Competence
- Understanding the Community
- Effective Collaboration
- Program Responsivity
- Demonstrating Program Results
- Staff Involvement and Integration

SUSTAINABILITY

Marek and Mancini (2005)
Elements of Sustainability: Overview

- Elements are varied
- Elements are interrelated
- The significance of particular elements vary from program to program

Marek and Mancini (2005)
Model of Sustainability

Elements that lead to sustainability
- Leadership competence
- Effective collaboration
- Understanding the community
- Demonstrated program results
- Strategic funding
- Staff involvement and integration
- Program responsivity

Marek and Mancini (2005)
Model of Sustainability

- Middle-range program results
  - Participant needs met
  - Confidence in program survival
  - Effective sustainability planning
  - Other program results

- Ultimate result
  - Program is sustained
Definition of Sustainability

- Power or capacity of programs to continuously respond to identified community issues
- It is more important to sustain benefits to families and communities than to sustain program activities per se
  - Programs can vary in intensity and frequency
  - Actual program activities can change

Marek and Mancini (2005)
The Nature and Importance of Sustainability

A sustained program:

- Continues to deliver programming to intended audiences over the long term consonant with program goals and objectives
- Modifies as necessary through expansion and contraction
- Supports community capacity
  - Communities with high capacity can better respond to community needs

Marek and Mancini (2005)
# Sustainability Elements Defined

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Competence</th>
<th>Effective Collaboration</th>
<th>Understanding the Community</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leaders establish goals, develop clear and realistic plans regarding development, implementation, evaluation.</td>
<td>Stakeholders who understand and support program goals, have clear roles, and who are actively involved in program.</td>
<td>Entails knowledge of community needs and assets, respect for community members, and involving them in meeting program goals.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Demonstrating Program Results</th>
<th>Strategic Funding</th>
<th>Staff Involvement and Integration</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The evaluation of program process and outcomes with acceptable methods; informing stakeholders of results.</td>
<td>Plans and resources in place for present and future programming; ongoing mechanisms to secure funding.</td>
<td>Staff committed to program goals, involved in important program decisions and activities.</td>
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<th>Program Responsivity</th>
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<td>Ability to adapt to changing community needs.</td>
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Marek and Mancini (2005)
Leadership Competence

- Leaders clearly establish the project’s mission and vision.
- Leaders planned within the first two years for sustaining the project.
- Leaders continue planning for sustainability.
- Leaders developed and follow a realistic project plan.
- Leaders identify alternative (and multiple) strategies for project survival.

Marek and Mancini (2005)
Effective Collaboration

- Local decision makers are project collaborators.
- Community service agencies are project collaborators.
- Collaborators share responsibility for providing program resources.
- Collaborators share credit for project success.
Effective Collaboration

- Collaborators have clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
- Collaborators share a vision for the project.
- Turf issues are resolved.
- Collaborators’ work on this project is supported by their agency.
- Collaborators are involved in program design, implementation, or evaluation.

Marek and Mancini (2005)
Understanding the Community

- Community needs are regularly assessed.
- Community resources and assets are regularly assessed.
- The project addresses key community needs.
- Community resources are effectively utilized by the project.
Understanding the Community

- Project goals are matched with community needs.
- Project needs are matched with community resources.
- The projects accounts for diversity in the community.
- The project has strong local governmental support.
- Community members are involved in program design or implementation.
Demonstrated Program Results

- Evaluation plans are developed prior to implementing programs.
- Project effectiveness is demonstrated through evaluation.
- Evaluations are conducted on a regular basis.
- Evaluation results are used to modify programming (expand, reduce, eliminate).

Marek and Mancini (2005)
Demonstrated Program Results

- Project successes are made known to the community, funders, etc..
- Public relations (marketing) strategies are in place to highlight successes and recruit participants, funders, and collaborators.
Strategic Funding

- Current funding is sufficient for the project’s operations.
- Funding is available on a long term basis (at least 2 or more years).
- There are plans in place for obtaining additional funding.
- There is adequate funding for hiring and retaining quality staff.

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Staff Involvement and Integration

- Staff are involved in program design.
- Staff are involved in project decision making.
- Staff are committed to the project mission, vision, and goals.
- Staff are qualified to work on the project.
- Staff are adequately trained.
- Staff are from the community that the project serves.

Marek and Mancini (2005)
Program Responsivity

- Goals and programming that no longer meet the community’s needs are reassessed and changed as appropriate.
- Projects that no longer meet the community’s needs are eliminated.
- When there are community needs that are not being met, programs are developed or expanded to better meet those community needs.
- Sites are consolidated, as appropriate, to better use project resources.

Marek and Mancini (2005)
Marek and Mancini (2005)

Program Sustainability: Translating Research and Theory to Action

- Research-Based Program Development, Implementation, and Assessment
- Being Intentional About Sustaining Programs
  - The Sustainability Workbook and Sustainability Index

Marek and Mancini (2005)
Middle-Range Program Results: On The Road to Sustainability

- Closely aligned with a program being sustained but are not end points (objectives rather than ultimate goals)
  - Continuing to provide benefits, in this case, meeting needs of at-risk families
  - Planning for sustainability, sooner rather than later
  - Having confidence in program survival
  - Other middle-range results
Ultimate Result: Program Sustained

- Can be defined in various ways
- Being sustained always transitory, here today and gone tomorrow
- Possible definitions:
  - Program goals met or exceeded
  - Programs expanded, sites expanded
  - Number of years in existence
  - Functioning to full capacity
  - Routine part of larger organization

Marek and Mancini (2005)
Model Effects and Directions

- Sustainability elements directly related to ultimate sustainability
- These elements also indirectly related through middle-range program results
- Middle-range results directly related to ultimate sustainability
- Direct and indirect effects yet to be fully tested

Marek and Mancini (2005)
Measure: Program Sustainability Index*

- Multi-item measure oriented around 7 sustainability elements (53 items, eventually distilled to 29 items)
- Confirmatory factor analysis (EQS program)
- Fit indices indicate viability of each sub-scale
  - Challenge to minimize correlated errors (multiple loadings)
- 29 of 53 items clearly loaded on a distinct factor
- Overall model analyses did not retain element of “understanding the community”
  - Items loaded across multiple factors
  - Internally strong factor

Measures: Middle-Range Program Results

- “To what extent does this project’s current programming meet the needs of at-risk children, youth, and families?”
- “When did program leaders begin actively planning for this project’s post-funding survival?”
- “How confident are you that your project will still be active in five years?”
Conclusions

- Consistent with the sustainability model, sustainability elements are related to middle-range program results.
- Other parts of the model not tested in this study.
- Particular sustainability elements more germane to these middle-range results (leadership competence, understanding the community, demonstrating program results, strategic funding, and staff involvement).
  - Each of these can be manipulated to increase chances of sustainability.
Implications

Findings suggest framework is a roadmap for being intentional about sustainability efforts through planning and implementation activities

- Leadership selection, training, and monitoring
- Strong and effective collaboration
- Community engagement of community-based programs
- Systematic evaluation of program process and results
- Funding strategies (example of diversification)
- Staff development and mentoring
- Adaptability and flexibility is required
The Sustainability Process: Applying Knowledge

- Developing a Sustainability Plan
  - Be as detailed as possible.
  - This is your map into the future as you work towards sustaining your project.
  - Your plan needs to be reassessed on an annual basis.

Marek and Mancini (2005)
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