

Assignment Four Discussion on Sustainability

Online Learning. OL 201 Designing and Funding Non Profit Projects

Center for Sustainable Development: <https://nonprofit.csd-i.org/ol-240-design-fund-manage-nonprofit-programs/>

Assignment Four. Skill Sets—Capacity Building

Sustainability can mean different things to different people in the nonprofit world. At the organizational level it frequently means does an organization have the management skills and fundraising resources to keep operating for the long term. At the project or program level it frequently means: "Is the project or program self-sustaining?". In other words, is there adequate program management and self generating revenue (as in fee-for-service programs) to continue providing services to community members for the long-term.

But the aspect of sustainability that we're going to focus on this week is: "Will positive outcomes for community members developed by the project or program continue for the long-term?". In other words, if one of your programs is to teach young mothers proper nutrition for their children so that they will grow up strong and healthy, will they continue providing proper nutrition to their children until their young adults. As those children begin having families of their own, will they have incorporated these good nutritional habits into their lives for their own children.

Here are some interesting quotes about sustainability from some of the resources at the bottom of the Assignment 1 discussion page:

Sustainability The ability of a project or program to operate on its own without outside support or intervention. Sustainability is often used as a measure of a project's long-term effectiveness.

Sustainable projects build a community's capacity to address issues without relying on external support. When selecting a project, think carefully about both the short-term and long-term impact. For example, building a modern well and water pump for a neighborhood without access to clean drinking water might solve a community's immediate water problems. But if the community cannot maintain the well, the people's water problems will quickly return. The same might be said for a community beautification project. A club could build a park, clean up litter, or paint over graffiti in an impoverished neighborhood, but if people from the neighborhood aren't invested in the project, the graffiti and litter will almost certainly reappear. Sustainable projects take these issues into account and provide long-term solutions to chronic problems.

A Rotary Community Corps (RCC) is a group of non-Rotarian men and women who share Rotary's values and commitment to service. With the guidance and support of their sponsor Rotary clubs, RCCs plan and implement projects that address issues affecting their communities. They can also help support Rotary club service efforts. Sponsoring an RCC can be an effective way to involve community members in planning and implementing service projects, and can help ensure their sustainability. Learn more at www.rotary.org/rcc.

Communities in Action: A Guide to Effective Projects Rotary International

<https://www.rotary.org/en/document/577>

SUSTAINABILITY WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

Sustainability is not just about money and planning. It is also about continuing to fill an identified need in your community. It will be necessary to periodically reexamine your program and the needs of your community. As your programs become more established, you will become more recognizable in your community. Look for opportunities where there is mutual benefit to partner with new segments of your community. How can the community rally behind your cause? Keep in mind that people support what they help create. Are there ways to engage more and more people in what you do? Can you get people in your community to care about your success? One of the keys to sustaining as an organization is having a constituency who believes in your work and is there to support you.

Community Toolkit: Planning Steps

Livestrong Foundation

http://assets.livestrong.org/pdfs/Community_Tool_Kit_FINAL.pdf

Organizational Sustainability

Fluctuations in the economy are a constant challenge to nonprofit sustainability. During periods of economic downturn, nonprofits experience a decrease in funding on top of an increase in demand for services. Often these financial setbacks lead to increased competition in the nonprofit sector, with many organizations vying for the same limited pool of available funding. This type of economic environment forces nonprofits to explore alternative approaches to generating income.

One viable alternative for nonprofits during times of economic instability is the introduction of mandatory, voluntary, or requested fees. This "fee-for-service" model allows nonprofit organizations to generate revenue by requesting or requiring payment for services and products.

You'll notice that a couple of the quotes mentioned support for the program from community members. This means that the community members have a sense of ownership about the project and are willing to help maintain positive outcomes developed by the program. Also, it's interesting to read the quote about fee-for-service programs. The fact that a community member would pay a nominal cost for a service provided by your organization is also an indication in their belief of what it is that you're doing.

So this means that in order to develop sustainability for positive outcomes, your organization needs to work with community members that they feel part of the program—so that they have a sense of ownership. But, community members need to learn to know how to do the activities that will maintain the positive outcomes—such as maintaining a well and a water pump in the example above.

Consequently, in this assignment will begin the process of developing a series of workshops and follow-up strategies for building the skill sets that community members will need to improve their capacity to participate in the program activities that you have designed. These skill sets are the specific things that they will need to learn how to do, learn how to incorporate them into daily/monthly routines, and learn how to ensure their continuation. Many of these skills are very simple.

For example, let's say that one of your programs is to help food bank clients gain access to community gardens. In my example project, one of my program activities is to hold a workshop and follow-up in family nutrition and home garden planning for nutrition. We're trying to encourage them to adopt sound nutritional practices and maintain them for a long time.

Another example could be that they don't know enough about gardening to get started. One activity in my program is to hold a workshop on forming garden beds and planting seeds with planned follow-up for six months. So, one skill set could be that we would like family gardeners to understand the value of adding organic material to their soil—and the value of maintaining and continuing to add organic material over time. We're trying to encourage them to adopt sound practices and maintain them for a long time. We want them to sustain the positive outcomes (in this example of growing healthy and nutritious food which will help them to have healthy and productive lives) that have been realized through our project.

This is very exciting because by writing a quick field guide—and then a workshop lesson plan—you will be able to lead a workshop that will officially launching the implementation phase of your project. A workshop in family gardening for nutrition might only take two or three hours—and be a no-cost workshop. Chances are you can think of a similar no-cost workshop for one of the activities from your project—and launch your project right away!

I look forward to seeing your work this week -- please move on to assignment 4.

Sincerely,

Tim Magee

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