



Sustaining the Legacy of Suicide Prevention Efforts A Guide to Getting Started with Sustainability Planning

“Sustainability” may sound like a straightforward concept, but it can include many strategies and approaches. Grantees need funding to continue programs. But how can you share responsibilities and resources with others in ways that take your program beyond a single grant or funding stream? Whether your grant is focused on urban, rural, state, tribal, or campus settings, there are common questions and experiences that can help sustain your work in suicide prevention.

How to Use This Guide

The purpose of this sustainability guide and accompanying tools is to help you formulate a one to two year sustainability plan. Because the environment will continue to change, we recommend that your planning group and stakeholders come together each year of the grant and beyond to recognize and celebrate successes, as well as to reprioritize the work moving forward.

As a grantee, you already have set goals, objectives, and strategies that are most likely reflected in your workplan. Before going further, we recommend that you review your grant planning models, such as your workplan, logic model (if you have one), and strategic plan, since they will be helpful references as you go through this guide.

Tools

We have provided a workbook (you can use either the Excel or MS Word version) with the following tools to use in your sustainability planning. We’ll refer to these tools throughout the guide. The workbooks, as well as grantee sample Sustainability Plans, can be found here: http://www.sprc.org/private_pages/grantee_resources.

- Instructions for Sustainability Worksheets
- The Big Picture
- Deciding What Needs More Work
- Prioritizing Your Work
- Addressing High Priority Outcome Gaps
- Logic Model Template (Optional)
- Sustainability Action Plan, Part 1
- Sustainability Action Plan, Part 2

In the Excel version of the workbook, click on the tabs (bottom left) to open each worksheet or tool. In the Word version, simply scroll down to each one.



We will use this icon when we ask you to use the workbook in your planning process.

The Big Picture

In planning for sustainability, it’s easy to get preoccupied with continuing existing activities, protecting people’s jobs, and trying to replace every dollar of the original grant. But for many, suicide prevention after the grant ends looks quite different than it did during the life of the grant.

As you go through the sustainability planning process, remember: **Your goal is to sustain ongoing suicide prevention initiatives.** What that looks like may change over time, but keeping an eye on that ultimate endpoint can help you step back from specific activities and personnel to make a plan that has impact beyond the end of the grant.

Terminology

Grants can vary in level of detail and how terms like “goals” and “objectives” are defined. Terms used in your grant proposal may differ from what we use here. For our sustainability planning work, we’ll use the following terms and definitions:

Goal: The ultimate result of your suicide prevention efforts.

For most of our work, the goal is lowering the rate(s) of suicide deaths and behaviors.

Outcome: The big picture change to risk and protective factors that will help you achieve your goal.

For example:

- “Improve youth and young adult problem-solving skills.”
- “Increase access to mental health services for at-risk youth.”

For the term “outcome” we will also use the phrases “Bigger picture change” and “long-term outcome.”

Objective: A concrete activity or product that will help you accomplish your goal.

Your grant may identify objectives that are framed broadly, such as:

- “In schools, conduct evidence-based youth training on suicide prevention that includes problem-solving skills.”
- “In high-risk settings, train gatekeepers to identify at-risk youth and refer them to mental health services.”
- “Develop a brochure for parents of college students.”

For our sustainability planning work, we recommend using SMART objectives (**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**ealistic, and **T**ime-bound).

For example:

- “Implement a student life skills training from the Best Practices Registry with 8 schools in the 4 counties that have the highest suicide rates in the state by June 2014.”

Speaking the Same Language

Different grantees often use the terms “goals” and “objectives” to mean very different things. We recommend matching up your grant goals and objectives with our definitions before you begin planning. For example:

- If objectives in your grant were broader than our definition (something like “School-Based Prevention”), it will be helpful to reframe them in SMART terms.
- You may have sub-objectives that better fit with what we’re calling “objectives.” Some worksheets have spaces for sub-objectives, but instead you may want call your sub-objectives “objectives” instead for this process.
- Or you may have named “goals” things that match up with what we’re calling objectives. For this process, we’d like you to call those items “objectives.”

- “Conduct gatekeeper trainings with 250 staff of juvenile justice facilities in Years 2-3.”
- “Develop a brochure on warning signs for suicide for parents of freshman by July 2013.”

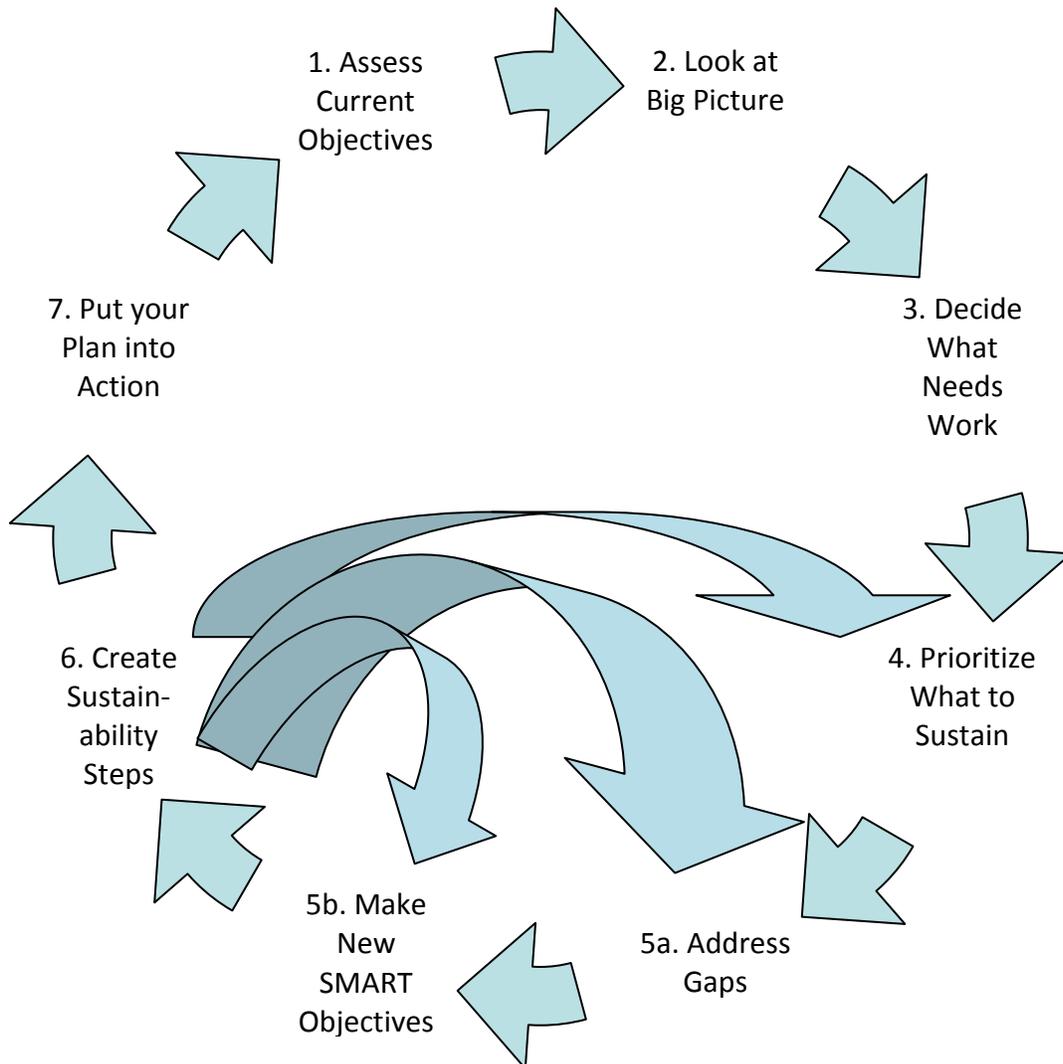
Activity or Action Step: The smaller steps needed to accomplish the objective.

For example:

- “Get school administrators’ agreement to implement program.”
- “Train teachers to deliver the student curriculum.”
- “Hold focus group with parents.”

Planning for Sustainability – A Model

This guide will take you through seven steps of sustainability planning, as illustrated in the diagram below. Although we will follow a sequential process, you may need to go back to earlier steps to be able to move forward successfully. The larger arrows identify some specific steps where it’s likely you may need to re-check your priorities and objectives once your action planning has begun.



Step 1: Assess Current Objectives

Start by going back to the objectives in your grant application, work plan, or logic model. You can use the accompanying worksheet **“Sustaining Suicide Prevention Work: The Big Picture”** to write down your thoughts as you go through each question in this section. For each objective (see definition above) in your grant, ask yourself the following questions:

- *Has the project been successful in meeting this objective?*
 - How do you know if it did or did not succeed?
 - What changed after this objective was implemented (What impact did it have)?
 - What do your data or other impact measures tell you?

- *Were there challenges that changed the objective or prevented success?*
 - What challenges or barriers arose?
 - Did you modify your approach?
 - Did you make any progress in this area?

- *Which parts of this objective’s work have momentum?*
 - What has helped it move forward?
 - Whose support has been key?



Fill in the first five columns on the “Big Picture” worksheet for each objective.

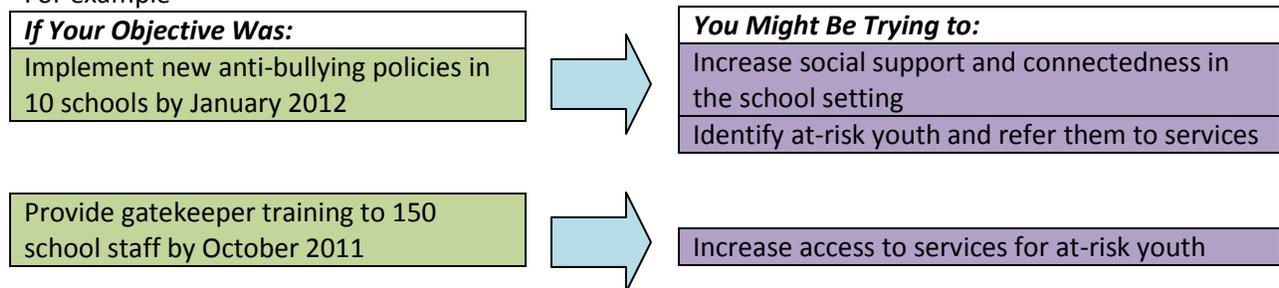
Step 2: Look at the Big Picture

When you are thinking about sustaining suicide prevention, it can be helpful to focus on the bigger picture changes you are hoping for, rather than just on specific objectives. Looking at how the objectives decreased risk factors and increased protective factors can help you figure out which of your objectives were the most successful. Focusing on this level of change can also help your team come up with new ways of supporting protective factors and reducing risks once the grant is over (so you don’t have to be tied to just continuing existing grant activities).

Take a step back to look at how each objective relates to the big picture of reducing suicide risk factors and increasing protective factors.

Which risk factor and/or protective factor was each objective meant to change?

For example



For each objective listed on your “Big Picture” worksheet, write the corresponding big picture outcome in the sixth column.

Step 3: See What Already is Sustained and Decide What Needs More Work

Before you consult with your planning group you can decide which objectives do not need further attention at this point because they are already on track to be sustained.



Fill in the “Deciding What Needs More Work” worksheet for each of your objectives.

You can take already-sustained program objectives off your list entirely. List those in column three on the worksheet. For example:

- Objectives that are now embedded or institutionalized (meaning they have been built into the regular operations, policies, or protocols of your organization or partner agencies). In some cases, these objectives may be included in Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) or legislation. These objectives should now be able to continue without further programming or investment from your group, so you can take them off the list.

Recognize and celebrate objectives that have been embedded or institutionalized! These key programs and activities will now be sustained for the next few years, so you do not need to include them in your current plan.

Some of your program objectives are not yet sustained, though. List those in column four of the worksheet under one of the following two descriptions:

- Objectives achieved but still need help or work to sustain (e.g., 50% of the mental health clinicians in the area have been trained, but there is no current plan for if or how the trainings will keep going after the grant.)
- Objectives not yet achieved

Step 4: Prioritize What Else to Sustain

Ideally, you would find funding to continue everything you’re doing. But in these financially tight times, it’s important to assume you will not be able to replace the grant dollar for dollar. So it’s helpful to consult with your task force, planning group, coalition, or other stakeholders to prioritize outcomes and objectives in order to continue the ones at the top of your list in some way.

Now comes the hard part: prioritizing the remaining outcomes and objectives to decide whether to continue them, and if so, how. Basically, you’re hoping to get the biggest “bang for your buck,” by prioritizing existing or modified objectives based on what will create the biggest change for the smallest cost (in terms of money, people, and time). Balance the importance of the objectives with their “do-ability.”

Campus X created a collaboration with a student suicide prevention club through the grant. Since the Co-Project Director (who will stay on at the Counseling Center) will continue to serve as the staff advisor to the organization after the grant, this objective is already on track to be sustained and can be taken off of their list of what needs more work.

The same campus successfully reached its goal of training 250 key staff as gatekeepers, however, the trainer licenses will expire at the end of the grant and there is no budget to buy more booklets. This objective will need more work to sustain, so it stays on the list.

To create your sustainability focus for the coming years, your group should work with stakeholders and partners to determine your priorities. Here are potential criteria for determining high and low priorities:

- What objectives can be most easily implemented?
- What objectives are the most effective (have positive impact evaluation results)?
- Which have had the biggest impact on reducing risk factors and increasing protective factors?
- Which fill essential gaps in services or infrastructure?
- Which are the most supported/valued by the community?
- Which have ongoing funding?
- Which have the support of people who influence implementation?
- Which have a strong partner identified?
- What would bring the biggest change for the investment? (Where would resources best be spent to have the biggest impact?)



Place each outcome listed in column six of your “Big Picture” worksheet into column two of the “Prioritizing Your Work” worksheet.

In Year 2 of their grant, Site A met with their advisory board to begin sustainability planning. School-based gatekeepers had been referring at-risk youth, and the advisory board reported that students and staff loved the trainings, so they decided to make school trainings a high priority. However, the state Department of Education was not open to discussing mandated crisis response protocols, so the group decided that this was a low priority to continue using this strategy.

Got Data?

To help your team prioritize, look at some relevant data for your tribe, state, campus, community, and/or focus population.

For national or state data on specific populations and states, learn more about data sources from SPRC’s free online course on using data for strategic planning at <http://training.sprc.org/>. This course contains handouts on tribal and campus data sources and considerations.

For additional campus data considerations, we recommend the EDC/Jed Foundation Guide to Campus Mental Health Action Planning http://www.sprc.org/sites/default/files/resource-program/CampusMHAP_Web%20final.pdf (pp.9-11).

In column three, rank each objective as high or low priority in order to continue to accomplish the related outcome. Use the criteria at the top of column three to help you rank each objective, or come up with your own criteria.

Also in column three, describe the reasons for your priority rankings.

For your sustainability plan, you will focus on the objectives your planning team has decided are high priority. However, for your low priority objectives, decide whether the related outcome is sufficiently addressed in other ways. If not, keep the objective in mind as you go to Step 5, and note it in column 4 of the “Prioritizing Your Work” worksheet. Keep the rest for your next planning cycle. With limited resources, you cannot do everything.

Step 5: Consider High Priority Outcome Gaps to Address and Create SMART Objectives

As you plan for suicide prevention work going forward, you may realize that you have some highly important risk and protective factors that neither your site nor other players are addressing. This may be because your original grant objective that was intended to address these didn't get off the ground. Or because that objective is not a priority to continue. Or because you can now turn your attention to newly emerging areas of concern. Ideally, if you are starting these efforts it is in order to make them part of a larger planning process, such as the work of a tribal workgroup, campus coalition, state council or funded state office.

5a. Make New Objectives for High Priority Outcomes that Had Low Priority Objectives

Start with any outcome from your grant that won't be sufficiently addressed going forward (from Step 4).



On the “Addressing High Priority Outcome Gaps” worksheet, place any outcomes that need more effective objectives in the appropriate box. In the next column write why you need to focus on the outcome and whether it is a priority. If it is a priority, in the last column write new SMART objective(s) to address that outcome. See the definition and examples of SMART objectives on page 2. If you need help creating objectives, see the Logic model template below the chart.

5b. Address Additional High Priority Outcomes

Next, think about any newly emerging outcomes that were not part of your original grant. Due to funding or other concerns, it is perfectly fine to leave this section blank and let other partners take up these efforts, or wait until your next planning cycle to tackle these needs.



If you are considering taking on additional outcomes, place any that are not being adequately addressed by suicide prevention efforts in your area - and that your group has the capacity to work on – in the row below. In the next column write why you need to focus on the outcome and whether it is a priority. In the last column write new SMART objective(s) to address that outcome.

Step 6: Identify What You'll Need to Accomplish Your Priorities

Now it's time to plan the actions, resources, and partners you will need to sustain your priority objectives and implement new SMART objectives.

6a. Create Sustainability Steps



To figure out how you will sustain your existing *high priority* objectives, take the high priority objectives from the third column on your “**Prioritizing Your Work**” worksheet, and put them in the “**Sustainability Action Plan, Part 1**” worksheet in the places for objectives [see examples below, for Word and Excel versions].

Example

Prioritizing Your Work

Objective	What big picture, long-term outcome are you trying to change with each objective below? <i>(From Big Picture worksheet, last column)</i>	Is this objective a high or low priority to continue in order to accomplish the related long-term outcome? Why?	If this a low priority objective, are you addressing the outcome sufficiently in other ways? If no, put the outcome onto the "Addressing High Priority Outcome Gaps" sheet to create a new objective.
Objective 1:		ABC is a High Priority Objective	
Objective 2:			
Objective 3:			
Objective 4:			

Word version

[Site Name]'s Sustainability Action Plan, Part 1

Part 1: High priority objectives to set up for sustainability *(From Prioritizing worksheet)*

Objective [1]: ABC

Excel version

[Site Name]'s Sustainability Action Plan, Part 1	
Part 1: High priority objectives to set up for sustainability <i>(From Prioritizing worksheet)</i>	
Objective 1:	ABC
What is needed for sustainability (resources, tools, partners)?	

Next, for each objective determine what is needed to sustain it in terms of resources (funding, in-kind contributions, personnel, etc.), tools, and partners. Fill in the boxes stating how you will obtain these things. Think about how you will accomplish your objectives in an ongoing way without the current grant funding. Now is the time to get creative and to think not just about other funding sources, but also about your partners, champions, resources, and allies.

To help think about strategies, ask yourself the following questions about each objective:

- *What activities go into accomplishing our objective?*
- *Can we support the work using other funding/operational resources?*
- *Are there partners or stakeholders that could take on an activity or part of one? (Think about existing partners and also others who may have a vested interest and resources to help.)*
- *Do partners have the capacity to do these activities? If not, how could their capacity be strengthened?*
- *Could policy changes cause the activity to happen automatically (i.e., embedding or institutionalizing the activity)?*
- *Is there a way to pay for an activity, or parts of it, through in-kind contributions (e.g., meeting space, staffing, volunteer time, etc.)?*
- *Are there leaders/champions who could help obtain additional resources?*
- *What barriers might we encounter? How would we overcome these?*

The Legacy Wheel is a useful tool for thinking broadly about strategies to sustain your priority objectives. This tool can help you and your planning team think about creative approaches to support priority areas, such as how to use Leadership, Partnerships and Collaboration, Evaluation, and more for sustainability.

The Legacy Wheel is available here:
<http://www.promoteprevent.org/content/leaving-legacy-six-strategies-sustainability>

For who to keep informed, and how, see the section on page 9 of this guide on communication.

Next, list the action steps necessary to set up the objective for sustainability. After each action step, list the lead person and other team members who will carry out the objective, the timeline by which your team will start it and finish it, and any other notes you may have. Regarding the timeline, how long will it take you/your project staff/your partners to accomplish each action step necessary to ensure sustainability of your priority objectives? Remember, anything that will take longer than 1-2 years can also be revisited in your next sustainability planning cycle.

6b. Create an Action Plan for New Objectives



To create an action plan for your new SMART objectives, start by taking them from the last column on the “Addressing High Priority Outcome Gaps” worksheet and putting them in the “**Sustainability Action Plan, Part 2**” worksheet in the places for objectives.

For each new objective, follow the steps from 6a above.

Communicate Your Needs and Successes

In order to keep current partners, champions, and leaders engaged, and to enlist new ones, it is critical to communicate your program’s track record and successes (past and new) in an ongoing way.

In a way, you're "selling" your program, persuading people to invest time, resources, or funding by explaining why it should matter to them and how it serves their interests. You're also keeping current supporters motivated by celebrating successes, and ensuring awareness of your efforts so that they can continue to promote them. Remember that everyone is coming from a different perspective with different priorities, so try to frame your work in a way that will resonate with what is important to each partner.



Include this as part of your Sustainability Action Plan by saying who you need to keep informed and motivated. Remember to include this as part of your Action Steps.

A Cyclic Process

You may find after identifying what you need to accomplish your priorities (Step 6) that you do not have the resources or cannot identify partners to help sustain a priority objective. In that case, you may need to do one of four things:

- Brainstorm additional creative strategies with your planning group (Step 6)
- Go back to Step 5 and change the objective to one that you can achieve more easily while still impacting your priority change.
- Reprioritize and focus on an outcome that is more achievable (Step 4).
- Recognize that you do not have the ability to take on additional outcomes at this time (Step 5b).

Then follow the steps again to adjust your action plan.

Don't panic if you need to go back and re-think things. You can see from the model on page 3 that going back and forth between these stages is a part of the process of developing a realistic and achievable plan to sustain suicide prevention in your community.

Celebrate!

You're well on your way to leaving a legacy of suicide prevention that will last beyond your current funding situation. Remember, the environment you're working in will continue to evolve, with changing resources, staff capacity, community support, partnerships, and opportunities for funding and collaboration. To sustain your goal of suicide prevention, your planning group should repeat this process at least every two years, updating your plans as suicide rates, patterns, and local risk and protective factors change and new research comes out on effective approaches to save lives.

Grantee Y was hoping to sustain its means restriction campaign by asking the state police to take over advertising for their medication drop-off program to local communities. However, the state police do not influence local police departments, so the grantee changed their approach to work with a statewide pharmacy chain to advertise the program in their prescription information inserts.