

Sustainability Approaches



Summaries and Key Elements



CDC's Healthy Communities Program

CREATING A CULTURE OF HEALTHY LIVING

www.cdc.gov/HealthyCommunitiesProgram

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About Sustainability Approaches and Key Elements

Improving the health and well-being of a community is no simple task for a coalition. It takes long-term policy strategies for sustaining change in systems and environments. And it takes the necessary community and organizational infrastructure for carrying out those strategies. In short, a coalition needs a comprehensive plan for sustaining its public-health efforts, one that can help it manage internal and external challenges.

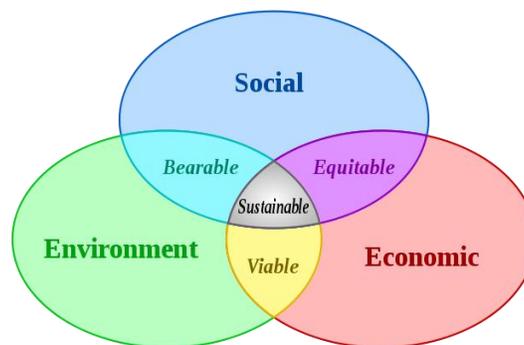
The Sustainability Planning Guide and Sustainability Approaches is a synthesis of science- and practice-based evidence designed to help coalitions, public-health professionals, and other community stakeholders develop, implement, and evaluate a successful sustainability plan. The Guide and Approaches documents provides a process for sustaining policy strategies and related activities, introduces various approaches to sustainability, and demonstrates sustainability planning in action with real-life examples.

The sustainability approaches described in this guide were developed with the help of an advisory panel that included experts on sustainability planning and approaches (listed on pages 3-7). Specific contributions include the following:

- Y-USA drew on multiple research streams and community surveys to determine sustainability needs as well as gather sustainability stories from the field.
- The Center for Civic Partnerships (CCP) contributed a version of its 10-step process for guiding communities through sustainability planning. These steps, including tools and resources, are based on CCP's nearly 10 years of program-sustainability training throughout the country.
- The Prevention Institute synthesized research and practice into a process for developing local policy, which can help practitioners and decision makers achieve long-term improvements and comprehensive, sustainable change.

What is Sustainability?

Sustainability is the end goal for every Healthy Community; however, it must be considered at the very start of coalition development and is best achieved by creating and implementing a sustainability plan. Not only does sustainability define a community's work and level of commitment to the work, but it the vehicle by which a community creates and maintains community support and needed resources (Figure below). Sustainability provides an infrastructure to identify and address community health challenges in the long run. It helps a community make the best use of the resources it has and makes it possible to leverage resources for future activity. In short, sustainability is 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 Approaches

This document summarizes sustainability approaches for strengthening the capacity of a coalition to function successfully and increase its chances of sustaining its efforts. There's no single strategy for ensuring sustainability. Rather, your coalition can approach it from many angles. Key among these are core approaches such as:

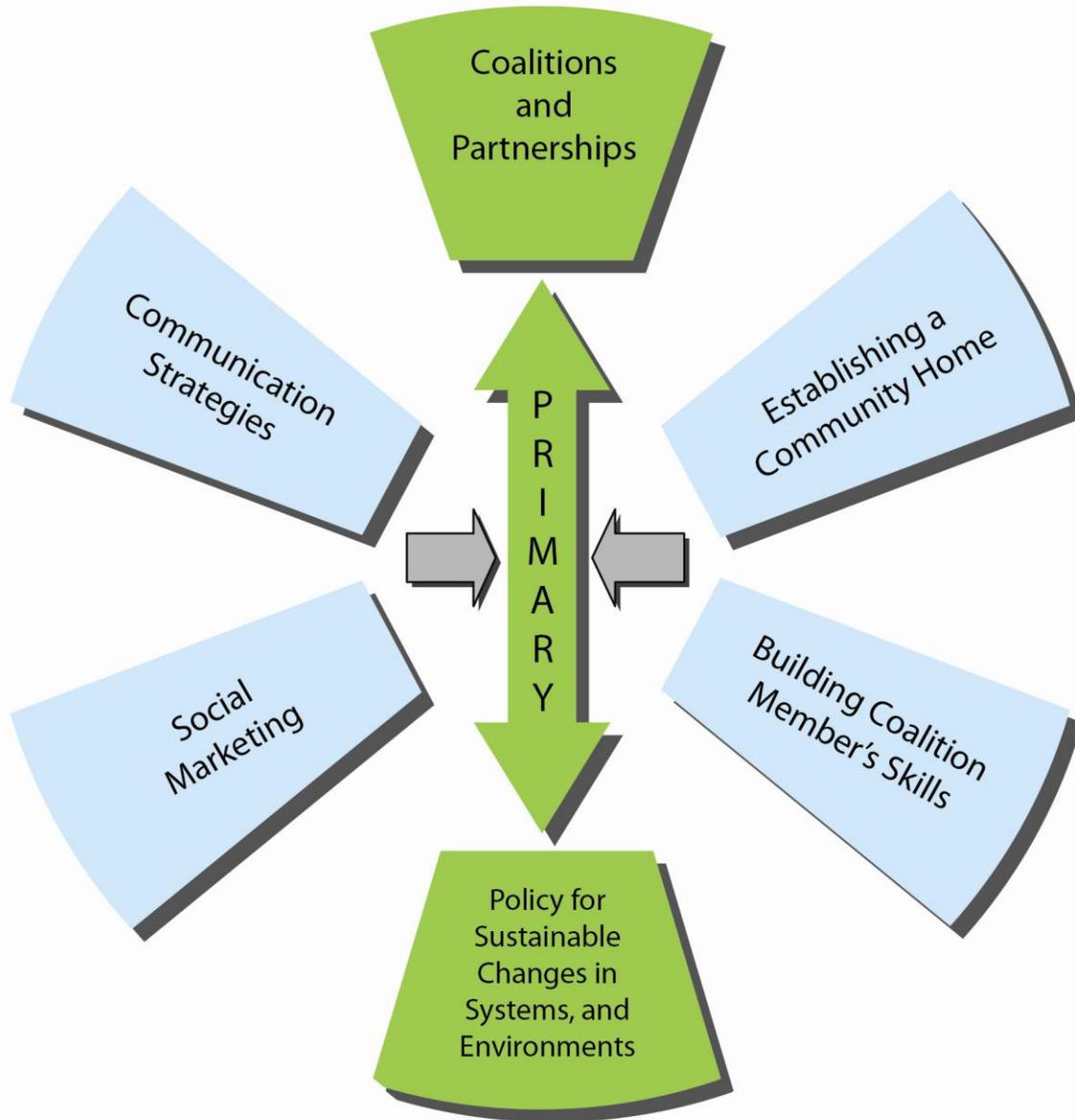
- 1) Building the long-term capacity of your coalition and relevant partnerships to achieve policy goals.
- 2) Developing and implementing policy, systems, and environmental change strategies.

In addition, your coalition should also engage in complementary approaches such as:

- 3) Establishing a home for your Healthy Communities work.
- 4) Focusing on building coalition members' skills.
- 5) Developing communication strategies.
- 6) Developing social-marketing strategies.

Sustainability Approaches Graphic

(Core approaches are in green and complementary approaches are in blue)



The Sustainability Approaches are summarized on the following pages.

Policies Create Sustainable Changes

Why are policies important for sustainability?

Policies can serve the concept of sustainability by providing long-term goals around which community members can rally. A coalition should not only promote policies but also ensure that they've been implemented as expected and are having the intended effect.

Sustainability is, in large part, about developing momentum to maintain community-wide changes that improve public health. Policy strategies are the most effective way to ensure long-term momentum.

While individual approaches to behavior change are important for health promotion efforts, these changes need to be prompted and supported by changes in environments, social norms, and networks that support positive health decisions. Whether implemented in schools, the community, or within community organizations, policy strategies can result in change on multiple levels, significantly impacting social and cultural norms and values.

To achieve sustainability, a policy strategy needs to impact everyone in its priority population. Policy strategies are a population-wide approach and can impact far more people than individual strategies. Policies can also be replicated in multiple community settings and on many levels.

In addition, policy strategies are more economically sustainable long-term than other approaches. Once a policy has been implemented, few, if any, resources are usually needed to sustain resulting community improvements. In fact, policy strategies can yield continuous improvements even if the institutions or coalitions that helped enact them are not themselves sustained. For these reasons, a policy approach is the best way to work toward sustainable change in the community.

KEY ELEMENTS FOR COALITIONS:

- ✓ Works to ensure its members and community leaders have a shared understanding of critical community health issues
- ✓ Has a clear understanding of the policy landscape
- ✓ Has a strong base of support with the ability to garner resources
- ✓ Has identified political champions to promote key policies
- ✓ Has support from leaders in relevant community settings
- ✓ Employs multisectoral policy, systems, and environmental strategies that impact populations on the community, county, state, and national level
- ✓ Promotes policy strategies that have with a strong organizational structure

Coalitions and Partnerships

Why are coalitions and partnerships important for sustainability?

The term “coalition” is used to describe a diverse group of individuals and organizations working together to achieve specific goals. Internal partners are coalition members who help plan and participate in efforts to accomplish those goals. External coalition partners (e.g., local decision-makers, funders, and media contacts) can provide assets or champion coalition causes.

Strong coalitions and partnerships help support sustainability by providing a platform and process that promote buy-in and support from participating community organizations and leaders. This heightened level of support enhances the reputation of the coalition and the Healthy Communities movement at large, increasing the likelihood of new funding opportunities.

Coalitions and partnerships can, among other things:

- Serve as effective vehicles for exchanging knowledge and ideas.
- Limit duplication of strategies and services.
- Demonstrate and develop community support for 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.
- Promote policies to create sustainable change in systems and environments.

KEY ELEMENTS FOR COALITIONS:

- ✓ Has community buy-in
- ✓ Selectively recruits partners into the coalition that from a variety of sectors and disciplines to support coalition goals
- ✓ Consists of diverse community organizations that dedicate staff, in-kind donations and funding to achieve strategies of the coalition (outcome)
- ✓ Has strong collaborative partnerships with federal, state, and local public health agencies
- ✓ Puts member commitments in writing (e.g., memorandum of understanding (MOU))
- ✓ Has a clear communication strategy for updating and engaging internal partners/members
- ✓ Consists of community members who are committed to the coalition and engaged in the development of coalition goals
- ✓ Ensures that member and external stakeholder roles and responsibilities are clearly outlined
- ✓ Agrees that planning is done collaboratively with partners, stakeholders, and coalition members

Establishing a Home for Healthy Communities Work

Why is a home for Healthy Communities work important for sustainability?

To ensure long-term success, a collaborative Healthy Communities initiative needs to adjust to potential changes — e.g., in funding, local opportunities or alliances, public health needs, and community and coalition leadership priorities. A critical step in meeting this challenge is to consider where and how to organize a base of operations — also known as a “community home” — so that the initiative can flourish during and after transformation (this includes thinking about the role of the fiscal agent). This community home should be able to: serve as an objective broker of public health resources; solicit and administer a variety of funding sources; appeal to a variety of community-based organizations; establish an internal infrastructure; and shift priorities to accommodate changes in goals and community needs.

As long as these criteria are met, a community home could be located in a government branch, a community health 501(c)3 organization, or an existing not-for-profit or for-profit venture (e.g., hospital or foundation). Or it may be best to develop a new 501(c)3. Each option has its strengths and weaknesses. Also, what works in one community may not work in another.

Once established, a community home could serve many important roles, including:

- Leader and advocate
- Overseer of knowledge transfer and translation
- Convener/broker of relationships
- Developer of standards
- Evaluator of evidence-based practice/practice-based evidence
- Monitor
- Grantor

KEY ELEMENTS FOR A COMMUNITY HOME:

- ✓ Works to develop a shared understanding of critical community health issues with members and community leaders
- ✓ Works to reach an agreement on the definition and importance of sustainability among coalition members and community leaders
- ✓ Has a stable base of operations that serves as a fiscal agent and is positioned to address a wide variety of community health issues (including the funding of issue specific coalitions or task groups if needed)
- ✓ Has developed goals, strategies and processes that appeal to a variety of community-based organizations
- ✓ Has internal processes and conflict resolution steps in place to manage competing interests and shifting priorities

- ✓ Has adequate skilled staff with sufficient time to maintain coalition processes
- ✓ Maintains a management structure and process that enable it to attract and manage funding from a variety of sources

Building Coalition Members' Skills

Why are building coalition members' skills important for sustainability?

Coalition members want to learn new skills, develop their capabilities, and grow their knowledge and careers. Helping them do so not only benefits the coalition as a whole, it also helps motivate members to sustain their participation.

Coalition training and skill building — referred to collectively here as “training” — are geared toward administrative, process, or public-health content. Administrative training topics can include fundraising, project planning, budgeting, and structuring coalitions for success. Process training can include such items as team building, leadership training, communication, and project planning. Public-health content can include current strategies to promote specific efforts around chronic disease risk factors (e.g., tobacco use prevention and control), physical activity and nutrition, understanding health equity, and elements of the built environment. Coalition members can learn skills from self-help methods (e.g., e-learning) or through face-to-face workshops that can help with strategic or program planning and process training.

Coalitions can use a variety of assessment processes to determine the best type of training, including surveys, coalition-wide discussions, consultation with coalition coordinators or technical-assistance (TA) staff, and a review of the literature on best practices.

The last two options are particularly important, because they provide an outside, objective perspective. TA staff members often come from funding organizations. They may have had high-level training and be in a position to offer detached insight into coalition training needs. A literature review is important because it can highlight ongoing research on how public-health coalitions can function more effectively and accomplish specific policy goals.

KEY ELEMENTS FOR COALITIONS:

- ✓ Provides learning and training opportunities to members and staff enabling them carry out the coalition's mission
- ✓ Offers adequate training in collaborative decision-making and leadership development
- ✓ Uses a variety of training approaches (i.e., internal training, support to area or state workshops, internet or self-help training)
- ✓ Ensures that members are matched with coalition activities to apply newly learned skills

Communication and Social Marketing

Why are communication and social marketing strategies important for sustainability?

By using various media to convey policy messages, coalitions are able to develop public/decision-maker awareness and support around policy strategies, in addition to keeping them informed about the overall Healthy Communities effort. Specifically, media efforts can help by:

- Promoting decision-maker buy-in of coalition vision, mission, and plans.
- Conveying the sense that coalition funds and other resources are being used wisely.
- Increasing chances that new funding or other resource-development opportunities will present themselves.
- Setting the stage for collaboration or coordination between organizations.

To get your message and call to action across clearly, make sure they are precise and easily understood. The ways coalitions can keep community and decision makers up-to-date include:

- Newsletters (electronic) distributed through Web site or e-mail,
- Social media (e.g., Facebook or Twitter),
- Regular columns in weeklies, newspapers, or trade publications,
- Periodic sustainability reports or annual action plans (print or electronic),
- Annual reports highlighting current plans and progress as well as future strategies,
- Personal e-mails from coalition members to contacts,
- Talk shows appearances (e.g., radio/TV/podcasts),
- Presentations at civic organization gatherings (e.g., PTOs, Elks, Chamber of Commerce, school superintendents, local trainings, or conferences).

In addition to communicating policy messages, it is important for coalitions to consider:

- Internal communication: communication directed at managing the work of a coalition or planning group.
- Community-wide communication: communication directed at keeping community members, leaders, and key decision-makers up-to-date on the overall Healthy Communities effort.

Social marketing provides an action framework for generating discussion and promoting information, attitudes, and values that are conducive to long-term behavioral changes in certain populations. Influencing behavior in individuals can contribute to policy changes within a community at large. When beginning your coalition's social marketing plan, remember to keep the audience's perspective in mind and consider all potential barriers to behavior change.

For your coalition's social marketing efforts to be successful, you need to know what can motivate a certain population to adopt a desired behavior. When making the choice to change, a person has to make an "exchange," or give one thing up in return for something else. This exchange can be concrete (money) or less tangible (improvement in health, social acceptance, or safety). It is

important to offer something very appealing in return for the desired behavior. To plan and implement an integrated social marketing strategy, it is imperative to remember the “4 Ps of Marketing”: product, price, place, and promotion.

KEY ELEMENTS FOR COALITIONS:

- ✓ Serve to manage the internal work of the coalition (i.e., timely meeting notes, agenda development, reports)
- ✓ Secure and maintain public support of the group and its mission
- ✓ Keep stakeholders informed and solicit input about coalition success, policy strategies, and coalition needs
- ✓ Increase community awareness and increase support of issues and policies
- ✓ Result in leader and community support through public comments, contributions, and volunteering
- ✓ Garner positive media attention for priority strategies
- ✓ Tailor marketing messages to appeal to priority populations
- ✓ Implement a social marketing strategy to increase awareness, foster understanding of the issues, and gain public support for community efforts.

Conclusion

This summary document aims to guide the sustainability efforts of your coalition or organization. The following take-home messages provide a summary of key concepts.

1. Begin thinking about sustainability as early as possible, preferably as you begin planning your coalition's policy strategies.
2. Sustainability doesn't just happen; it's a deliberate process with specific action steps. Focus on strengthening and sustaining your coalition's infrastructure in order to support policy strategies that lead to healthier communities. Flexibility and adaptability are hallmarks of sustainable organizations and strategies.
3. Sustainability is a complex goal and requires a multifaceted approach that reaches across all sectors of the community. This approach can include coalition building, social marketing, use of media and other communication methods, educational approaches that include mentoring and technical assistance, and resource development. It's an ongoing process of prioritizing effective, feasible strategies that are likely to be maintained.
4. Leadership and community champions drive sustainability efforts. If these individuals are supported by strong sponsoring institutions and organizations, their influence is even greater. They easily communicate their vision of change to others, perceive how certain policy strategies fit within the Healthy Communities Movement, and either have or can obtain needed resources.
5. Sustainability is based on collaboration. Any collective action is more than the sum of its parts, whether the focus is health, economics, government, or the environment. Ultimately, what is required is a broad perspective, a holistic view of the community as interwoven and interrelated. Using a community home approach, a coalition can help position itself and its Healthy Communities efforts for long-term success. Once we discard boundaries and limitations, the potential for every human being to live a healthier life will be maximized.

The future is literally in our hands to mold as we like. But we cannot wait until tomorrow. Tomorrow is now.

--Eleanor Roosevelt