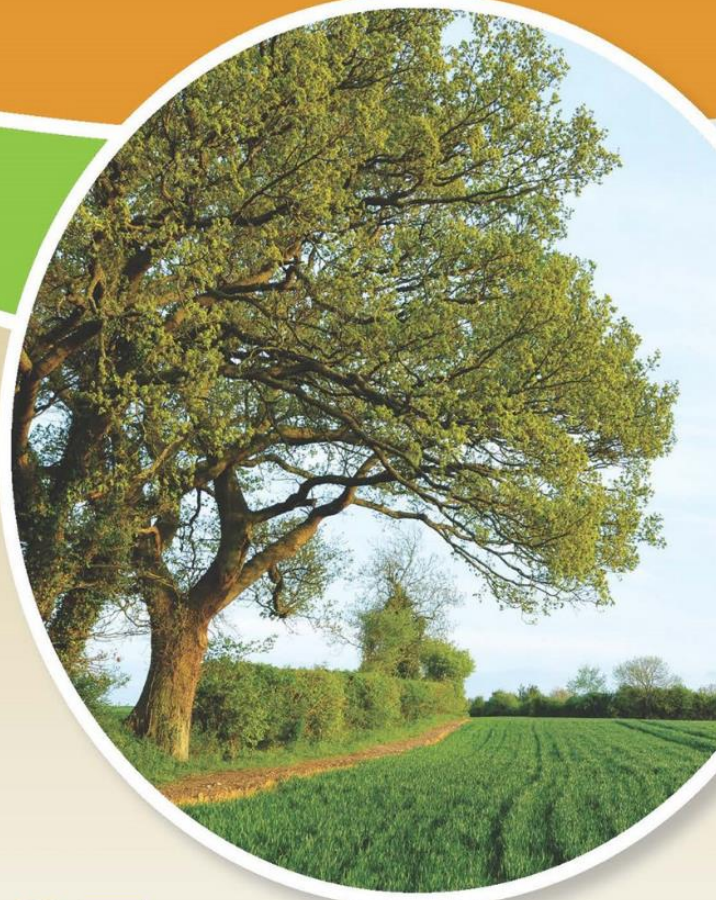I Strategy. I Capacity. I Sustainability.

QUICK COURSE

Positioning for Sustainability:
A Formative Assessment Tool©

Community
Health Systems
Development

Welcome!

This Formative Assessment Tool is provided by the Georgia Health Policy Center (GHPC) to assist you and your partners in preparing for the long-term viability and success of your health initiative and in completing your **Sustainability Formative Assessment Plan due on November 30, 2022**. Whether you are just beginning to implement a new program or you have been operating for several years, the experiences of other rural communities demonstrate that valuable programs and collaborations can be sustained long-term with foresight and effective planning. Do not wait until your initial funding is about to run out to begin thinking about how to continue the important work you have begun. This document can help you better position yourself for sustainability and prepare for the future by becoming more strategic and intentional in your everyday decisions and actions.

By the end of the assessment process, you and your team will:
- Become more aware of the critical areas of strategy, capacity and action necessary for sustaining community-based health initiatives, particularly in rural areas;
- Complete a Sustainability Formative Assessment – a structured process to help your team reflect on how well your program is currently positioned for sustainability relative to each of the dimensions of the Georgia Health Policy Center Sustainability Framework©; and
- Create a plan for improving your sustainability potential by building key competencies associated with long-term viability and impact.

For maximum impact, be sure to include your partners in this self-study process. By working together to complete this assessment, you can achieve a shared understanding of the key attributes of sustainable coalitions and initiatives, reflect on your current performance relative to those characteristics, and create a foundation for improving your sustainability potential over time. Incorporating a broad range of perspectives will help to clarify your current strengths and generate interest in addressing areas of need that you identify together.

What is included in this tool?

This document includes not only a practical Sustainability Formative Assessment Tool© but also important background information that will help you get the most from the assessment process.

What does sustainability mean? In this section sustainability is broadly defined based on the experience of hundreds of rural health initiatives nationwide.

What do sustainable programs and coalitions have in common? The Georgia Health Policy Center *Sustainability Framework*© is included to describe the fundamental characteristics and capacities associated with long-term viability and lasting community impact. This framework is derived from current literature on factors that drive sustainability and GHPC's extensive field experience providing technical assistance to more than 1000 rural communities over 25 years.

Why do a formative assessment? The benefit of a formative assessment is to help you gauge not only how well your program or partnership is positioned for sustainability relative to the *Sustainability Framework*© but also to help you chart a path for improvement in areas of need.

Are we positioned for sustainability? A Sustainability Formative Assessment Tool is provided to facilitate the process of identifying areas of strength and opportunities for improvement with a goal of improving the sustainability of your health initiatives.

What can we do NOW to improve our sustainability potential? Tips are offered for analyzing your assessment results and planning for the future.

What does *Sustainability* mean?

Over the past decade, sustainability has been a focus for many government agencies and foundations that fund and operate community-based programs and non-profit organizations. Increasingly, organizations and collaborations are concerned with sustaining programs or services beyond initial grant periods and pilot phases. There are multiple definitions of sustainability used by funders, researchers and community-based organizations. For the purposes of this assessment tool, sustainability is defined as:

Programs or services continue because they are valued and draw support and resources.

Sustainability does not necessarily mean that the activities continue in the same form as originally conceived, funded or implemented. Programs often evolve over time to adjust to the changing levels of support and needs of the community. Organizations may start with one approach, but ultimately elect to sustain a different model of service provision after testing it in the community. For example:

- A grant may provide "start-up" funds to establish services that are expanded post-grant period;
- An initial investment may fund a model or pilot program from which a new program approach evolves;
- Programs may be sustained, but the services provided or the coverage area are scaled back to reflect a reduction in resources to support the program.

What do Sustainable Programs Have in Common?

Sustainability is not random luck, nor can it be achieved through a prescribed set of actions. It is important to recognize, however, that sustained programs and organizations appear to have some attributes in common. The Georgia Health Policy Center has developed a *Sustainability Framework*© that describes nine elements of strategy, capacity, and action that help to position an organization or program for sustainability.

1. **Strategic Vision**
2. **Collaboration**
3. **Leadership**
4. **Communication**
5. **Evaluation and ROI**
6. **Capacity**
7. **Efficiency & Effectiveness**
8. **Relevance and Practicality**
9. **Resource Diversification**

It will be useful to familiarize yourself with the *Sustainability Framework*© prior to beginning the formative assessment process. The key to understanding each component is to put it into the specific context of sustainability. As you read through the *Sustainability Framework*©, consider

how each element may enhance the long-term potential for a program, organization or activity. Leadership, for example, has many applications and benefits. Leadership in the context of sustainability means that you have created a shared vision, have leaders within your team that see the relationship between short-term activities and long-term outcomes, and that you have engaged leaders that will exert their influence in leveraging support and locating resources.

Why do a Formative Assessment?

At the core of a formative assessment is the goal to "form" or improve. This is a different purpose than that of summative assessments. In a summative assessment, you are being evaluated on the end result, or "sum," of your efforts.

Both are very useful. Formative assessments are particularly helpful in determining progress and identifying areas to concentrate efforts while there is still time to influence the end result.

Additionally, formative assessments…

…are designed around rubrics - sets of criteria and standards organized into levels that establish a continuum of increasing expectations of quality.

…can be used to chart change over time.

…present a clear path for attaining greater levels of quality and performance.

Are We Positioned for Sustainability?

The Sustainability Formative Assessment Tool© may serve multiple purposes:
- To capture your general level of functioning related to elements of the *Sustainability Framework©*;
- To provide guidance as to what activities or capacities are indicative of improvement or movement along the developmental spectrum;
- To isolate or highlight areas where continued work or development might be needed; and
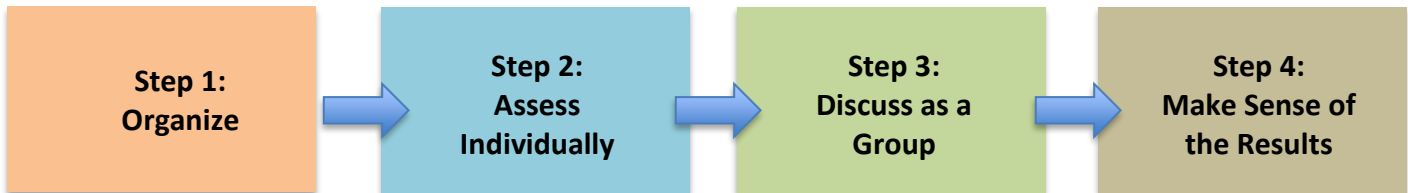- To provide a baseline against which change (positive or negative) can be viewed over time.

For each component of the *Sustainability Framework©*, developmental rubrics have been described for each level of performance in a table format. These rubrics are not intended to be definitive, meaning you are not necessarily expected to fit each description perfectly. Rather, they are provided to illustrate a continuum along which you might progress with higher levels of performance – giving you an idea of what "improvement" or growth in a particular area might look like.

Before you conduct the assessment, take a moment to review the terms used in the tool's rubric (see the Appendix at the end of this Quick Course). Each item will ask you to rate yourself in one of four levels. A *general* description of these four levels is provided in the table below. Note: Your TA Provider will provide you with a link to a survey that you can share with your partners to record your assessment ratings.

Level	Description
Pre-Awareness = P	Not yet aware of the importance of the element and/or its relationship to sustainability
Awareness = A	Aware of the importance of the element, but may not have sufficient capacity (e.g., not know how to solve the issue) or motivation (e.g., waiting for leadership and/or direction to address the issue)
Interaction = I	Aware of the importance and have translated available "know-how" and motivation into some sort of initial action on the component; there is evidence of impact on the component in limited ways, though results are likely limited and inconsistent
Mastery = M	Aware, capable, and strategic in their actions. Worthy of being a model in how to address the component for others.

Conducting the Formative Assessment

With a shared definition of sustainability, an understanding of the range of activities and capacities associated with greater potential for long-term viability, and an appreciation for the value of doing a formative assessment, you are now ready to begin the four-step process of completing the self-assessment.

Step 1: Organize	Step 2: Assess Individually	Step 3: Discuss as a Group	Step 4: Make Sense of the Results

Step 1 – Get Organized

The Sustainability Formative Assessment Tool© is included as an Appendix to this document. Make sure everyone completing the assessment has reviewed the background information provided in earlier sections of this document. That context will be critical to their ability to answer the questions in the tool.

Step 2 – Take time to reflect and react

(Estimated time, 30 minutes)

Next, make sure you've got a block of quiet, uninterrupted time to complete the assessment – likely 20 to 30 minutes. As you read each item and the practical examples for each level, you might say to yourself, "Well, we do a few things at the Pre-Awareness level and a few at the Awareness level – which are we?" In these situations, choose the level that you think most represents your current state. Remember, this tool isn't intended to be used for exact measurements, rather as an indication to plan and chart progress. You may want to refer to the earlier table in this section that describes each level in very general terms.

It is important to note that while we all have the innate desire to demonstrate our worthiness and success, it's unlikely that you will be able to honestly rate yourself at interaction or mastery on many, if any items. That's okay – it's expected. There is no "failing score" on this assessment. It only adds value when users have the courage to see things as they are, not as they hope them to be. You are beginning the important step of identifying and working to address areas of need.

Be sure to record your responses using the Formative Assessment Survey Link provided by your TA provider.

Step 3 – Come together to share responses

(Estimated time = 2 to 3 hours)

If you shared the assessment with your partners or team members, convene the group once everyone has worked through the tool and completed the survey independently. You will likely need to select a facilitator for this part of the process, a person who can ensure that the conversation is productive and that everyone has a chance to contribute to the dialogue. Set aside a couple of hours to allow ample time to decide on next steps.

First, you will need to provide a summary of the results to all participants. If your partners have completed the Formative Assessment survey, your TA provider will provide a summary report as well as the raw data to you.

Positioning for Sustainability:
A FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT TOOL©

Georgia Health Policy Center

OVERVIEW

The Sustainability Formative Assessment is designed to be a structured process to help your team reflect on how well your grant-funded initiative is currently positioned for sustainability relative to a set of factors that are known to be drivers of long-term sustainability. Click here for additional information about the Sustainability Framework©.

Here is your sustainability score: 2.6

Component	Score
Strategic Vision	3.8
Collaboration	1.4
Leadership	2.4
Communication	2.2
Evaluation & Return on Investment	2.8
Capacity	2.2
Efficiency & Effectiveness	2.9
Relevance and Practicality	2.8
Resource Diversification	3.0

1 = Pre-awareness
4 = Mastery

MAKING SENSE OF YOUR DATA INTERPRETING YOUR RESULTS

You evaluated your partnership's performance on each of the nine components of the Sustainability Framework. Now that you've received your results from the Sustainability Formative Assessment, it's important to understand what the results are telling you about your current positioning for long-term sustainability. We recommend that you engage your partners in reflection on the results so that you will come away with a shared awareness of the critical areas of strategy, capacity and action necessary for sustaining your health initiative.

There are three perspectives to consider when reviewing the summary of scores.

1. How consistent are the responses across individuals?
Consistency of responses is the starting place for discussion.

- Are most scores within one ranking of each other? Highly consistent responses indicate there is consensus about the current state of your efforts.
- Do you notice any outliers in the scoring (i.e., are most scores are within one ranking of each other except for one or two which are greatly different?)
- Do you see a lot of divergence, where answers vary considerably on multiple components? You will see this expressed in the variance score for each component. The closer to zero the variance, the more consistent the scoring across respondents.

Step 4 – Make Sense of the Results

The goal is to use the score summary as a tool for facilitating reflective dialogue with your team.

There are three perspectives to consider when reviewing the summary of scores.
1. How _consistent_ are the responses?
2. What is the _overall sense_ of performance?
3. What is the sense of _performance for each_ of the nine components?

Work with your team to answer each question. The following is a guide to help facilitate this discussion.

1. How consistent are the responses?

Consistency of responses is the starting place for discussion. Highly consistent responses indicate there is consensus about the current state of your efforts. Generally, your team's summary will fall into one of three categories:

A. Consistent – most scores are within one ranking of each other

B. Outlier(s) – most scores are within one ranking of each other except for one or two which are greatly different

C. Divergent – answers vary considerably on multiple components

Once you have determined which category best describes your team, discuss the following insights and questions.

> _A. Consistent_
> - _This may be an indication that your team employs effective strategies to keep your members informed and engaged. What tools and tactics do we credit most with keeping all team members informed and involved in the progress of our initiative?_
>
> _B. Outlier(s)_
> - _Is there an easy explanation for the outlying score(s)?_
> - _Is there an opportunity to reach greater consensus on the scores?_
>
> _C. Divergent_
> - _What might be some of the reasons for the divergent scores among our team?_
> - _Is there a need to discuss each component to reach consensus on a generally accepted score for each?_

2. What is the overall sense of performance?

Overall performance is the next topic for your group to consider. It is best to take a "big picture" perspective before diving into details of a particular component. Generally, your team's summary will fall into one of three categories:

A. High – scores on most components are high (3 or 4)

B. Gaps – scores on some components are high and some are low

C. Low – scores on most components are low (1 or 2)

Once you have determined which category best describes your program, discuss the following insights and questions.

A. High
- *Are these high scores merited or did our team wish to avoid being critical?*

B. Gaps
- *What do the score gaps tell us about our efforts?*

C. Low
- *Are these low scores merited or did our team not want to be overly generous?*

3. What is the sense of performance for each of the nine components?

Next, discuss each of the nine components. Use the following questions to facilitate discussion on each.

- *What conclusion can we draw from this score?*
- *What have we done to contribute to this score?*
- *Are there efforts in place now that will likely impact this score in the future? (e.g., an activity that is likely to succeed but will take time for results)*

After completing the assessment and making sense of your results, your organization or collaborative should be better able to answer the question posed at the beginning of this section, "Are we positioned for sustainability?" Hopefully, the formative assessment process and tools have helped you focus more intently on the key capacities and strengths associated with long-term viability, reflect on your current performance, and engage in strategic conversations with your partners. You can also use the results as a benchmark for your continued progress.

The final section of this guide can help you improve your potential for sustainability through strategic action.

What Can We Do Today to Improve our Sustainability Potential?

The outcome of this exercise should be the improved likelihood of sustainability. The discussion and insights may be useful but without action in a positive direction this is merely an academic exercise.

To assist with your efforts, suggested next steps are presented in relation to the three most common scenarios. These are general suggestions and are based on the Georgia Health Policy Center's years of experience in providing technical assistance to teams such as yours. They are, however, suggestions and should be carefully considered for appropriateness and effectiveness by your team.

1. We couldn't reach consensus on our score summary

Suggested actions:

- *Identify the cause of the inconsistency. Is there a lack of information or differing perspectives of performance?*
- *Address lack of information by creating forums for team members to receive information and ask questions.*
- *Have the group complete the assessment again in 4-6 weeks and determine consistency of responses.*
- *Call another meeting and use a voting method to determine a score for each of the components.*
- *Determine if the composition of the team needs to be altered in the case of someone purposely subverting the process.*

2. We scored consistently low on the components.

Suggested actions:

- *Identify the cause of the low scores – true measure of performance or tendency to be critical?*
- *Review the need for sustainability of this program or initiative.*
- *Review capacity of team – is it feasible to expect additional efforts?*
- *If committed to sustainability, identify three or four key areas to focus on in the near term; it's not feasible to address all nine at once.*
  - *Strategic Vision and Leadership are usually regarded as essential initial components*

3. We want to improve our score(s) on one or more components.

Suggested actions:

> - *Carefully review the scoring rubric on the Assessment Tool. It provides the criteria needed to attain higher levels of performance.*
> - *Recognize that moving from Interaction (3) to Mastery (4) usually requires time, practice, and feedback. It will take much more time and effort to move from 3 to 4 than from 1 to 2, or 2 to 3.*
> - *Determine a plan of action that includes deadlines and someone responsible for leading each task.*

Based on your formative assessment results, the discussions with your consortium, and the components that have been prioritized for improvement, establish the next steps for building your capacity and increasing your potential for sustainability and complete **Part IV: Priority Area Objectives** of the Sustainability Formative Assessment Template.

Congratulations on completing an important step toward sustainability. As you continue your important work in the community, continue to think and act strategically, and build your capacity related to the components of the *Sustainability Framework©*. In a year or so you may choose to reassess your performance, taking time to both celebrate progress and make new plans for continued improvement. Positioning for sustainability is an ongoing effort and a focus on these components will greatly expand your options in the future.

Appendix:

Sustainability Formative Assessment Tool©

Component: Strategic Vision	Current Status			
	Pre-Awareness	**Awareness**	**Interaction**	**Mastery**
The consortium/network has a clearly defined vision for what it hopes to achieve with the funded initiative	□ All program activities are viewed as short-term in nature	□ There is a recognition of the need for long-term planning, but the focus is primarily on short-term program implementation	□ There is a long-term concept for specific program implementation	□ This initiative/program is part of long-term approach for systemic change
All those associated with the initiative share its vision	□ The vision is developed in isolation of partners	□ The vision is developed with limited input from partners and no commitment	□ Partners participate in development of vision, but without organizational commitment	□ All partners develop, share, and are committed to vision
All activities are aligned with vision	□ Program activities are not defined or implemented in reference to stated vision	□ Program activities are oriented to address a specific issue but are not aligned with any long-term vision	□ All program activities are oriented to a specific issue, and some are aligned with a long-term vision	□ All program activities contribute to fulfilling a long-term strategic vision

Component: Collaboration	Current Status			
	Pre-Awareness	**Awareness**	**Interaction**	**Mastery**
Our Partnership includes stakeholders necessary for the successful planning, implementation, and or continuation of the initiative and/or programming	□ Our partnership was formed in order to fulfill funding requirements	□ Our partnership is based on previous relationships that may or may not be appropriate to address the current problem □	□ Our partnership assesses and expands to include organizations that can address the problem	□ Our partnership includes all organizations needed to strategically address the problem
Partners play an integral role and have a shared interest in the outcomes	□ The lead organization performs all program activities and retains all financial resources	□ The lead organization performs most program activities with participation by some partners □	□ Most partners engage in program activities, some resources are shared among partners □	□ Partners jointly make decisions about overall program direction and utilization of resources and have a shared interest in project outcomes

Component: Leadership	Current Status			
	Pre-Awareness	Awareness	Interaction	Mastery
Inspires others to create and achieve a shared vision **Understands the relationship between short-term activities and their impact on long-term success** **Exerts influence in leveraging support and resources**	□ Program staff is responsible for program implementation with no input from the leadership of partner organizations.	□ Leadership of partnering organizations engages in short-term problem-solving focused on work plan implementation	□ Leadership of partnering organizations actively engages in developing strategies for long-term success	□ Leadership moves beyond existing partnerships to engage others to define, accomplish, and sustain the vision and program through shared responsibility by creating an environment of collaboration and enthusiasm

Component: Communication	Current Status			
	Pre-Awareness	Awareness	Interaction	Mastery
The consortium/network defines perceptions, translates successes, and creates awareness through effective communication	□ The consortium/ network has no plan for communicating program to the community, and funders. Other stakeholders are unaware of program	□ The consortium/ network makes use of some public media (e.g., press releases, newsletters) and other methods on an ad hoc basis to update the community on its program activities	□ The consortium/ network regularly uses public media and other methods to update the community on both its activities and program effectiveness	□ The consortium/ network has developed targeted messages and a communications strategy that effectively utilizes available media channels to build awareness and public support for program
Information is exchanged among partners and stakeholders through structured and informal channels.	□ Communication is limited to one-on-one interaction between lead agency and partners as needed	□ Communication and interaction amongst partners occurs only during infrequent meetings	□ Partners communicate amongst themselves during regularly scheduled meetings	□ Partners and stakeholders proactively initiate communication amongst themselves

Component: Evaluation & "Return on Investment"	Current Status			
	Pre-Awareness	**Awareness**	**Interaction**	**Mastery**
The evaluation generates data necessary to: • **monitor and manage program implementation,** • **measure program impact, and** • **demonstrate social, economic, and/or health benefits to community served.**	□ There is no evaluation plan in support of the program	□ Evaluation activities generate data that are used to monitor program activities	□ Evaluation activities generate data that are used to: • monitor program activities • inform and adjust program implementation • measure program impact	□ Evaluation activities generate data that are used to: • satisfy funder's reporting requirements • monitor program activities • manage program implementation • measure program impact • demonstrate social, economic, and/or health benefits to community served

Component: Capacity	Current Status			
	Pre-Awareness	**Awareness**	**Interaction**	**Mastery**
The organization has adequate capacity to complete programs based on: • **Personnel with necessary skills and knowledge, and** • **Experience with projects of similar scope or focus.**	□ The experience of the organization and staff do not match the scope or focus of the proposed program	□ The organization has limited experience with programs of similar scope and focus. Current staff will require significant training in order to implement the program	□ The organization and staff have some experience with programs of similar scope and focus. Additional personnel will be required to adequately staff the program	□ The organization and staff have a track record of successfully completing projects of similar scope and focus
The organization has the systems, processes and structures to effectively integrate new programs	□ The program approach is designed without consideration of organization's current systems, processes and structures	□ The organization considers changes to existing systems, processes and structures when incorporating new programs	□ The organization revises/creates systems, processes and structures to accommodate new programs	□ The organization seamlessly integrates all programs and the knowledge that results from program implementation and evaluation filters throughout the organization

Component: Efficiency & Effectiveness	Current Status			
	Pre-Awareness	**Awareness**	**Interaction**	**Mastery**
Operations maximize the ability of those being served to participate and produce intended results	☐ Those being served are not consulted in program design and implementation	☐ Feedback from those being served has little influence on program design and implementation	☐ Feedback gained through formal methods, such as surveys and focus groups, is used to guide program design and implementation	☐ Those receiving services have an integral role in program design and implementation
The program approach is based on the successes and challenges of similar initiatives	☐ The program approach is developed without knowledge of evidence-based programs or consultation with other similar successful programs	☐ The program approach is developed with cursory understanding of similar initiatives	☐ The program approach is developed following consultation with others who have implemented similar programs	☐ The program approach is derived from evidence-based initiatives
The organization draws from and contributes to existing community resources	☐ The program services operate independently of other related community initiatives	☐ The program services draw from and offer limited support to other related community initiatives	☐ The program approach provides unique and complementary services to the community	☐ The program approach has an integrated role in the provision of services in the community; others recognize and support that role

Component: Relevance & Practicality	Current Status			
	Pre -Awareness	**Awareness**	**Interaction**	**Mastery**
Relevance: The program approach is based on a clear assessment and understanding of the need and demand for the program	☐ The program approach was designed without a needs assessment that provides data to support the need and demand for the program	☐ The program approach was designed based on data that demonstrate the need, but with no understanding of the demand (input from clients/patients, key stakeholders, etc.) for the program	The program approach was designed based on data that demonstrate the need and informal (i.e., casual conversations) input from clients/patients and key stakeholders	☐ The program approach was designed based on a comprehensive needs assessment and has a proven link to a health issue that is high on the public health agenda of clients/patients and stakeholders
Context: The program approach is tailored to the environment (cultural, political, economic)	☐ The program approach does not take into account contextual factors that may inhibit or facilitate successful implementation (e.g. geography, policies, economic trends, local culture)	☐ The organization is aware of some key contextual factors that may affect implementation of the strategy/approach, but has not taken action to address those factors in the program adaptation	☐ The organization has identified some contextual factors that may affect implementation and is taking action to adapt the program approach to address those factors	☐ The network partnership exhibits deep understanding of the context within which they operate and has designed an approach that takes into account current contextual factors
Complexity: The program approach is likely to accomplish desired impact because it takes into account the magnitude or complexity of the problem	☐ The program approach is inadequate in scope given the complexity of the problem it targets	☐ The program approach is narrow in its scope and is a stop gap measure to serve short-term needs with no attempt to understand and address the root causes of the problem	☐ The program approach begins to address the complexity of the problem through targeted activities that are broader in scope	☐ The program approach is designed with a deep understanding of the root causes of the problem at hand and addresses the problem in a comprehensive manner

Component: Resource Diversification	Current Status			
	Pre-Awareness	**Awareness**	**Interaction**	**Mastery**
The organization/network receives diversity of support generated through sustainability planning	☐ The initiative is supported by a single funding source; does not engage in sustainability planning	☐ The initiative is supported by more than one source without benefit of sustainability planning	☐ The initiative is supported by a variety of sources developed through an ad hoc approach to sustainability planning	☐ Multiple sources contribute adequate funding for long-term sustainability; support is generated through formal, on-going sustainability planning

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