

Sustainability

A mutual challenge requiring new strategies

- by Mary Vallier-Kaplan



Sustainability challenges the foundation and the grantee alike. This challenge arises from sustainability's nebulous definition. Additionally, there are unclear expectations between both parties as well as the ill-defined best practices in our field. The good news: we each no longer need to suffer in silent angst. Instead, we can discuss sustainability at the start of a project, replacing the dreaded, negative difference of opinion about "why now?" when the grant ends. There is currently an increase in research, analysis, and dialogue between funders and grantees nationally, statewide and at the individual grantee level. Here at the Endowment for Health, we're attempting with our grantees to unravel this mystery for both parties. This partnership will eventually result in a better understanding of the critically important but elusive task of sustainability. It will ensure that the hard-won progress of our mutual work continues over time – the true definition of sustainability.

Foundations worry about ensuring that their influence on an issue continues, whether they were the catalyst or just one of many investors. We wonder if we can afford to walk away, but we also wonder whether we can afford to or should stay. For grantees, the worry is where the funding will come from next. How do we successfully bring new funders into an ongoing project?

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A critical question at all levels of the discussion is what we are ultimately trying to sustain. Are we trying to sustain a program? Is it about the capacity of organizations and communities? Is it more to do with lessons learned? Relationships? All of the above or nothing at all? To date, the Endowment has tried to implement a concept of "multiple levels" of sustainability, believing that together, both the program and the capacity of nonprofits impact our shared mission to improve the health of the people of New Hampshire. Grantees typically want to sustain the program side of the equation. The Endowment typically wants to sustain long-term health-improvement outcomes and systemic change of the health care infrastructure. Most of all we want to learn together how to best do this work in New Hampshire and then incorporate it into our future work. Over the course of six years, the Endowment has narrowed its desired outcomes or theory of change to primarily three: knowledge, leadership and working together. Clarifying these foundation-level expectations continues to be a challenge. Our evaluation structure strives to allow measurement of the multiple levels of impact.

The Endowment recently completed its first sustainability study of its work to date (see below) and will continue this analysis on an ongoing basis. It helps us to better understand desired outcomes as well as the successful sustainability of the projects in which we invest. From this, we can modify our strategies accordingly to further achieve such outcomes for future grants. We also study the best practices of sustainability from other foundations, several of which are referenced below. We include the perspective of both the foundation and the grantees. The Endowment designed many of its program systems using demonstrated best practices of sustainability. These include multi-year grant making, investment in the capacity of nonprofits, availability of planning and technical assistance resources, and a strong evaluation system. We include sustainability outcomes as well as commitment of staff time to assist in leveraging funds and relationships on behalf of grantees. We are also willing to invest in policy change to better access public funding. Along the way, we've learned not to push organizations past their missions (commonly known as mission creep). Organizations are sometimes cursed when a grant is so large that it risks becoming the sole source of funding. At the end of the day, the proverbial advice holds true: It is never too soon to start sustainability planning.

Program Year 2009 will include the implementation of some new Endowment strategies to enhance sustainability. Most likely we and other foundations will invest for even longer periods of time in a single theme and even a single project. At the same time, tapering grant amounts and requiring matching grants may more often be used as a strategy to encourage sustainability planning. Each Endowment proposal currently requires an up-front discussion of sustainability and all Endowment grants require a sustainability outcome in the Workplan. The rigor of implementing both of these requirements may increase. At the same time we will more carefully articulate our expectations and offer more assistance (both EH and technical assistance) to help sustain a project. Community involvement in projects will be expected earlier.

Given the importance of sustained leadership, investment on issues of retention and succession planning will increase. Compatibility of missions will be more closely reviewed during the proposal review. We will more strategically connect evaluation outcomes as a tool to leverage further investment by others in a successful project. It is most likely the Endowment will pilot a New Hampshire funders collaborative relative to a particular theme, issue or health in general. We also will experiment with the development of a "learning community" for our new Children's Mental Health theme. Learning communities are proven strategies to achieve greater sustainability of an initiative. We will continue to collaborate with more national health funders on behalf of New Hampshire's nonprofits similar to our strong relationship with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Finally, we will keep working proactively with the nonprofit community and New Hampshire residents to advocate for improved national, state, regional and local health-related public policy -- especially adequate public funding of health improvement of New Hampshire's residents.

Mary Vallier-Kaplan is Vice President and Chief Operating Officer at the Endowment for Health

Where Are They Now?

Learning from the Endowment's Study of Project Sustainability

- by Karen Horsch



be sustained.

Since its founding in 2001, the Endowment for Health has made 523 grants totaling \$23 million to help realize its mission to "improve the health and reduce the burden of illness of the people of New Hampshire, especially the vulnerable and underserved." Like many foundations, the Endowment funds projects that test new ideas and models with the hope that, if successful, these will continue after the initial grant investment ends. Like many foundations the Endowment hopes to learn how to better support grantees so that their work can

The Foundation recently followed up with 23 of its first theme implementation grants (grants completed before September 2006 and totaling \$4.2 million) to identify which ones continued to operate after Endowment funding ended. We set about understanding the factors that contributed to or hindered their sustainability. Of these 23, nearly two-thirds were sustained at the same or increased levels after Endowment grant funding ended. Nearly half of the grantees reported serving more people; four reported serving new populations since their grants ended. For some of the grants in this study, funding levels increased after the Endowment grant period ended. However, for nearly 70% of them, overall funding decreased. Some grantees continued to operate at the same or increased levels with decreased funding because activities were absorbed into organizational operations or because Endowment funding paid for nonrecurring start-up expenses. For the eight grantees in the study that operated at reduced levels or ceased operations, the reason most cited was reduced funding or lack of funding.

From these grant experiences, several sustainability factors emerge and are consistent with study findings conducted by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Health Foundation of Greater Cincinnati, and the California Wellness Foundation.

Reimbursable Funding: Without question, the ability to obtain reimbursement for services was a key factor contributing to sustainability of the projects in this study. Because many focused on the vulnerable and uninsured, especially children, public funding sources (Medicaid) were most often the reimbursement source. By contrast, projects that reduced or ceased operations after Endowment funding did not directly provide reimbursable services: care coordination, respite care, health advocacy, and outreach.

Partner Commitment: Another important factor for sustainability was the willingness of partner organizations to step in and agree to fund or to increase their existing levels of funding for a project. This experience points to the importance of clarifying the host organization and partner commitment to long-term viability early in a project.

Community Support: Support from members of the community, both clients and other stakeholders, was also cited by grantees as an important contributor to continued operations. Several grantees generated community support and awareness through marketing efforts or by cultivating direct connections to key project stakeholders and community members. In one case, generating the support of school nurses and teachers was critical to viability of the project; in another, the support of local community agencies was key to ensuring the project had referral sources as well as visibility and credibility in the community. Conversely, the inability of another project to gain “clout” in the community seriously undermined its goals and thus could not be sustained.

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Leadership and Staff: Leaders and strong staff take projects and make them excellent. They champion projects and they work to promote awareness of the project among key allies. Leadership, embodied in individuals like project directors and groups like task forces, were critical to ensuring project activities continued after the Endowment grant period ended. Grants that were sustained at the same or increased levels also had committed and long-standing staff who saw the project as their “mission.” Other staff attributes such as teamwork and high morale were also cited as key factors. By contrast, the loss of a key leader or high staff turnover can threaten long-term viability of a project.

Early Planning: Another crucial factor for sustainability was early planning. Planning, conducted by staff or task forces, helps lay the groundwork for realistic project implementation as well as deliberate planning for sustainability. As one interviewee remarked, “From the beginning, we knew we had to develop a plan for funding.”

Political, Social, Economic Contexts: Things often outside the control of the grantee also played a part in sustainability. Grantees spoke about “luck” in being at the right place with the right ideas at the right time. These were ideas that directly addressed new needs or situations or were consistent with changing public policy. At the same time, “luck” also worked against the sustainability of some projects. For instance, a local funding crisis reduced a town’s commitment to a project. In another case, one project’s approach lost favor among a group of foundation funders.

This study identifies various factors that affect project sustainability and points to several actions that foundations and grantees can take to increase the likelihood of viability and success after the final progress report is submitted. However, it is important to acknowledge that not every project needs to be sustained. The Endowment and its partners must be willing to conclude that some projects should not be continued for various reasons – and much can be learned from these experiences as well.

The Endowment for Health is one of a few foundations evaluating the extent to which their grant-funded activities are sustained after their support ends. We plan to continue to follow up with grantees two years after their Endowment grant funding has ended and again three and seven years later. We will continue to apply what we learn about sustainability to our future work with partners. Our work may encourage other foundations to ask the important question about the long-term impact of their work -- where are projects now?

Karen Horsch is an evaluation consultant to the Endowment for Health.

Tiger Treatment Center

A model of sustainability

- by Susan Bryant



The Tiger Treatment Center (TTC), a school-based health center and program of New London Hospital, was started with a grant from the Endowment for Health in 2002. The Center opened in the fall of 2003 with the goal of providing comprehensive and preventive health services to students in a high-need New Hampshire school district at the Newport Middle High School. Its goal: to improve student health, behavior and academic achievement.

Sustainability of the TTC was a conscious decision of the Board of Trustees of New London Hospital from the beginning. The Endowment for Health grant allowed for a year of planning and also covered the first 18 months of operations for the Center.

In its fifth year of operation today, TTC enhances access to primary care for enrolled students and also functions as a referral center for the unique healthcare needs of adolescents to community resources such as mental health and specialty care. Each student visit to TTC is documented and shared with the student's primary care provider. If the student does not have a primary care provider, he or she is referred to a New London Hospital provider at our Newport Health Center.

The Center is staffed by a nurse practitioner who sees students on a daily walk-in or appointment basis, participates in sports clinics and provides back-up coverage for the school nurse as needed. More than 300 students are enrolled in the Center and in 2005, the Center also began offering services to enrolled faculty and staff.

Two important partnerships help to make the Center successful. The Newport School District provides space, administrative support and school nurse time for TTC. Additionally, Colby-Sawyer College conducted initial needs assessments and student satisfaction surveys and now works with the Center each academic year, sending senior nursing students for a clinical experience.

The Tiger Treatment Center is a budgeted department of New London Hospital – part of the very fabric of the organization just as its practice areas are. Its costs are offset by insurance or Medicaid reimbursement, a small amount of sliding scale self pay, grants, and the hospital operating budget. A portion of TTC's annual operating expenses are absorbed by the hospital in addition to the time dedicated by one of our physicians serving as medical director.

The TTC was an immediate success in the school and in the community. Indeed, the executive director of the Newport Chamber of Commerce declared, "The Tiger Treatment Center is the best thing since sliced bread for this community." As a result of the community's enthusiasm and support, the TTC has received numerous grants for operational support from the Newport Service Organization and the Newport Charitable Fund.

Each year New London Hospital dedicates resources to submitting grants for the continued support of the TTC. The New Hampshire Charitable Foundation and the Barnard Foundation are examples of funding support that have been awarded to the Center over the years.

Operational support for the Center was also included in the school district budget during the 2004-05 school year. Unfortunately, due to constraints on the school budget, this has not occurred again. Nevertheless, the TTC enjoys the full support of the School Board, the superintendent of the school district and the school principal.

"New London Hospital's commitment to the program and the community are the foundation of the sustainability of the school health center."

The TTC is fortunate to have the support it requires to continue to serve the students. New London Hospital's commitment to the program and the Newport community are the foundation of the sustainability of the school health center. Even with financial support, sustainability would not be as successful as it has been if it were not for the continuing solid working relationship with the school district. Much of this is due to the commitment of the clinician working in the TTC and the responsiveness of the program's administrative manager to any concerns of the school district.

Susan M. Bryant is Senior Director of Community Relations at New London Hospital

Kim Firth is one of "40 under Forty"



The Endowment's own Kim Firth has been selected by the Union Leader as one of 40 up and coming people, all under the age of 40, who are making a difference in our state. This year's 40 will be honored when the Business and Industry Association of New Hampshire hosts a recognition ceremony.

Kim Firth is a New Hampshire native and Bradford resident whose career positively impacts the state. As a Program Director at the Endowment for Health, Kim works with community partners on projects that improve the health of New Hampshire's people. Most recently, she mastered the complex topic of children's mental health and oversaw first-in-the-state research as well as an advisory committee of more than 75 mental health professionals. Her leadership helped launch a five-year, multi-million dollar commitment to strengthen the children's mental health care delivery system. She has been an articulate and knowledgeable spokesperson on the topic, garnering both statewide and national interest. Kim is a consummate leader, able to work with diverse parties with an inclusive approach.

Kim's body of work also includes previous service at the Department of Health and Human Services, where she conducted research on a variety of health-related topics and managed the Health Care Fund Community Grant Program. Before that, Kim served in a variety of leadership roles on domestic-violence issues, including the AmeriCorps Victim Assistance Program and the Strafford County Domestic Violence Project, where she worked to support and empower victims while holding abusers accountable.

Kim's name is synonymous with commitment and respect. Her collective experiences give her a unique perspective on health programs and policy in New Hampshire.

Resources on Sustainability

[The Effective Exit: Managing the End of a Funding Relationship](#) (read the free PDF online). EH has a printed version that can be loaned out.

[Sustainability Planning Workbook by The Finance Project](#)

[Developing a “theory of sustainability”](#), page 23-25 End Games: The Challenge of Sustainability, The Annie E Casey Foundation

[Exit Strategies – factors for success](#), page 7 Community Fund research

New Reports on Endowment Supported Projects

Report of the Mental Health Commission

[Fulfilling the Promise: Transforming NH's Mental Health System - Full Report](#)

[Fulfilling the Promise: Transforming NH's Mental Health System - Executive Summary](#)

March 6:

Preparing an EH Proposal

Morning Session

In this workshop you will learn more about:

- Endowment grant types
- Planning your project and proposal
- Writing and submitting your proposal
- Using the online application with confidence
- Creating a grant budget and its justification
- The Endowment grant review process including review criteria

Presenters: Mary Vallier-Kaplan, Vice President and Chief Operating Officer and Sue Fulton, Director of Administrative Services.

The workshop will be held March 6, 2008; 10 a.m. - Noon at the NH Hospital Association in Concord. Contact [Peg LePage](#) (603-228-2448) to register.

Logic Model Workshop

Afternoon Session

Logic models focus on outcomes. They are a tool increasingly used by organizations to plan, manage and evaluate projects. All Endowment for Health proposals currently require a workplan based on the Logic Model. Learn the basics of logic models in this training and how they can be applied to your program. In this workshop you'll learn more about:

- The broad definition of a logic model
- Developing a logic model specifically for EH-funded projects
- Using a logic model for project planning, management and evaluation

Presenter: Karen Horsch, evaluation consultant to the Endowment for Health.

The workshop will be held March 6, 2008 from 1 to 3 pm at the NH Hospital Association in Concord. Contact [Peg LePage](#) (603-228-2448) to register.

March 17: EH Annual Meeting 4 to 6 p.m.

Keynote Speaker – Dr. Lauren LeRoy, President and CEO of Grantmakers in Health, will speak about the role of public policy and foundations. The meeting will be held at the Grappone Conference Center in Concord, New Hampshire.

Coming Soon: EH 2008 Listening Sessions

This year we travel to eight new locations around New Hampshire to hear what's on peoples' minds about health-related issues. We'll be visiting Groveton, Warren, Wakefield, Alstead, Raymond, Manchester, Plainfield and Loudon. Check our website next month at www.endowmentforhealth.org for times and locations.

March 31:

[Planning, Convening and Technical Assistance proposals due.](#)