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Sustainability in Program Evaluation

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Hezel Associates (Syracuse, NY)

Evaluation, Research, and Planning Contractor

- Implementation and outcome evaluations of 2 to 5 year projects
- Main focus: workforce development and STEM programs in higher education
- Current Scope:
  - Partner on 10 NSF projects in 9 programs
  - Serve as third-party evaluators for 11 TAACCCT evaluations

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Topics

Defining sustainability

Common obstacles

How can evaluation contribute to sustainability?

Discussion

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Defining Sustainability

- <u>Program Sustainability Assessment Tool</u>: The ability to *maintain programming* and *its benefits over time.*

- <u>HUD Program Sustainability:</u> The act of *decreasing dependence on one source of funding* and shifting financial support for program implementation to a new funding stream.

- <u>Nonprofit Impact:</u> Having the human, financial, technological, and organizational resources to *provide services to meet needs and attain results towards mission on an ongoing basis;* and requiring the organizational and programmatic infrastructure to carry out core functions independent of individuals or one-time opportunities.

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Defining Sustainability

- The capacity to exist (e.g., projects, programs, mankind) and/or continue (e.g., human, social, economic, and/or environmental benefits). For programs, this usually means **existence** (temporal durability) **beyond termination of initial support** via mechanisms that have been used to develop the program.

- Client case-studies

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Defining Sustainability

For the purpose of our presentation sustainability is defined as:

Continuing program activities or vital components of program activities to achieve intended outcomes without relying on future grant funding

Common Obstacles

Clients

- Definition is unclear
- Short-term focus
- Grant managers are not decision-makers

Evaluators

- Time
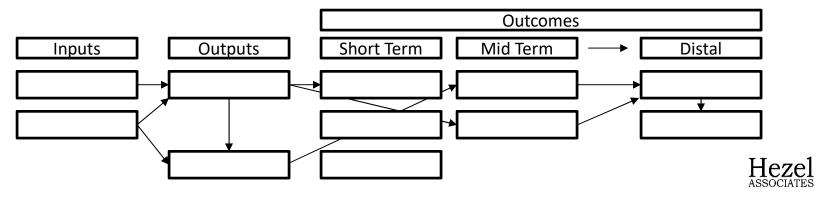- Resources
- Multi-site programs

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How can evaluators help?

- ✓ Sustainability from the start

- ✓ Embedding sustainability into the evaluation

- ✓ Make sustainability evaluation useful

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✓ Sustainability from the Start

- Define sustainability and identify program components that stakeholders want to sustain
- Establish RQs focused on sustainability

  What program components are worth sustaining? How can those components be sustained?

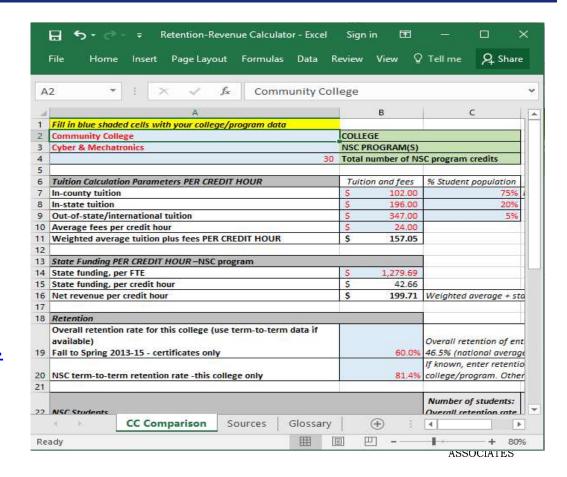- Use the logic model as a guide

✓ Embed Sustainability into Evaluation

- Early in the evaluation:
  - Include sustainability-focused items in evaluation instruments
  - Assess components identified by stakeholders
  - Look for emergent program components
  - Triangulate from different stakeholders
- Final Years
  - How can program components be sustained?

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✓ Make Findings Useful

- Include sustainability in formative and summative reports
- Make findings accessible for decision-makers
  - Sustainability plan
  - Retention-Revenue Calculator https://www.skillscommons.org/handle/taaccct/2534

Roundtable Questions

In your experiences, what challenges or obstacles have you encountered when evaluating sustainability?

What value can evaluating sustainability provide for your projects?

What types of program components are important for sustaining it?

Can you think of any additional strategies for evaluating sustainability?

Additional Resources

- **Program Sustainability Assessment Tool** (developed by the Center for Public Health Systems Science, Washington University in St. Louis): Assessing a program's capacity for sustainability. https://sustaintool.org/ Actual tool: https://sustaintool.org/sites/default/files/Sustainability%20ToolV2_w%20scoring_12.11.13.pdf

- **US EPA Snapshot** of ten high-performing asthma management programs: Provides examples of successful asthma programs; highlights importance of evaluating the system and using data to inform sustainability decisions. http://www.asthmacommunitynetwork.org/sites/default/files/Snapshot.pdf

- **HUD Program Sustainability**: Overview of the how and what of program sustainability for government programs. http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=hhpgm_final_ch7.pdf

- **Sustainability Evaluation Checklist** (Western Michigan University): Guides evaluation for and of sustainability. http://usaidprojectstarter.org/sites/default/files/resources/pdfs/SEC-revised.pdf

- **Integrated Strategy for Success and Sustainability** (Nonprofit Impact): 3-step process http://www.eblcprograms.org/docs/pdfs/Path-to-Sustainabilty_article_v3.pdf

- **Building Sustainable Programs: The Resource Guide** (Office of Adolescent Health, HHS): Guide to developing sustainability plan, with a section regarding measures of success http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/assets/sustainability-resource-guide.pdf

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