The OPA Framework for Program Sustainability

November 2017

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Planning for sustainability is critical to ensure adolescent health programs and services are sustained over time, as local needs, financial climates, and policy change. This document details **The OPA Framework for Program Sustainability** along with the **factors for program sustainability** for grantees supported by the Office of Population Affairs (OPA). Note: in June 2019, the Office of Adolescent Health (OAH) merged with OPA. The framework, created in 2014 and updated in 2017, is part of a series of resources to support grantees in planning for long-term success. Grantees can find these resources on the [Key Resources for TPP Grantees](#) of OPA's website.[1]

The factors for program sustainability include:

- **Strategize:** Create an Action Strategy
- **Assess:** Assess the Environment
- **Lead:** Identify, Engage, and Develop Leaders
- **Evolve:** Remain Flexible and Evolve
- **Communicate:** Communicate with Stakeholders
- **Integrate:** Integrate Program Services into Community Infrastructure
- **Partner:** Build Strategic Partnerships and Mobilize the Community
- **Diversify:** Secure Diverse Financial Opportunities

The factors are based upon research[2,3] and on-the-ground experiences of OPA grantees and serve as a foundation from which grantees can begin, enhance, or reconstruct their sustainability planning efforts. There are a variety of approaches to defining and understanding sustainability. In some situations, it is simply a continuity of a program or service – the ability to continue program services through funding or resource shifts and losses.[4] In others, it is about institutionalizing services or the continuation of activities and impact; creating a legacy, including continuing organizational ideals, principles, and beliefs; upholding existing relationships; and/or maintaining consistent outcomes.[2,3,5] For OPA, the concept of sustainability is linked to its vision and mission to advance best practices that improve the health and well-being of America's adolescents, enabling them to become healthy, productive adults. Acknowledging the many definitions of sustainability and variation of adolescent health programs, each grantee should develop its own concept of sustainability. However, OPA offers the following perspective to assist grantees.

A Perspective on Sustainability

Adolescent health programs are better positioned to achieve sustainability when they leverage partnerships and resources effectively to continue programs, services, and/or strategic activities that result in improvements in the health and well-being of adolescents.

Adolescent health programs are better positioned to achieve sustainability when they leverage partnerships and resources effectively to continue programs, services, and/or strategic activities that result in improvements in the health and well-being of adolescents.

To determine their own vision of sustainability, grantees should take a full account of programs, services, and/or strategic activities at multiple levels. These levels of engagement might include the individual, participant, provider, facilitator, program, institution, community, systems, or/and policy levels.

The OPA Framework for Program Sustainability assists with *program* sustainability, as opposed to *organizational* sustainability, though the two are inherently related. For a program to thrive and be sustainable there must be organizational capacity. There are other tools available to assist grantees with organizational capacity.[6, 7, 8]

Program sustainability planning should focus broadly on responding to community needs and mobilizing stakeholders. Effective organizations must adapt to these changing trends by growing, being flexible, and tailoring efforts.

Program sustainability planning should focus broadly on responding to community needs and mobilizing stakeholders. Effective organizations must adapt to these changing trends by growing, being flexible, and tailoring efforts. This framework creates a foundation to think critically about sustainability planning. It provides flexibility and allows grantees to infuse elements of their own local experiences into the planning process. Grantees are encouraged to repurpose the framework, the factors, and related materials to meet their needs and vision for program sustainability. Each grantee should work with its partners to create and implement its own unique sustainability strategy. As the literature and evidence for sustainability expand, this framework will evolve; so too should a grantee's sustainability efforts.

THE OPA FRAMEWORK FOR PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY

Program sustainability includes different strategies, from building internal capacity, to securing new funding, to incorporating programs, practices or policies into other organizations to ensure continuity. Sustainability also involves managing and leveraging resources (financial and otherwise), and focusing on community needs which change over time. Effective programs adapt to these trends and evolve with the climate. The following **factors for program sustainability** provide a foundation from which grantees can build sustainable programs:

- **Strategize:** Create an Action Strategy
- **Assess:** Assess the Environment
- **Lead:** Identify, Engage, and Develop Leaders
- **Evolve:** Remain Flexible and Evolve
- **Communicate:** Communicate with Stakeholders
- **Integrate:** Integrate Program Services into Community Infrastructure
- **Partner:** Build Strategic Partnerships and Mobilize the Community
- **Diversify:** Secure Diverse Financial Opportunities

Planning for sustainability is a fluid, continuous process. As displayed in Figure 1, the factors for program sustainability come together to form a tree-like structure. The factor *create an action strategy* represents the roots of sustainability whereas the factors *assess the environment* and *identify, engage, and develop leaders* form the trunk of the tree, and create a solid base for sustainability activities to grow. The other factors represent branches and leaves of a tree, lengthening or contracting, growing or shedding, as needed. The factors

Figure 1: OPA Framework for Program Sustainability Tree

for program sustainability may occur simultaneously, and grantees may prioritize certain factors over others depending on their specific needs and goals. Grantees should tailor and incorporate these factors to form their own unique sustainability
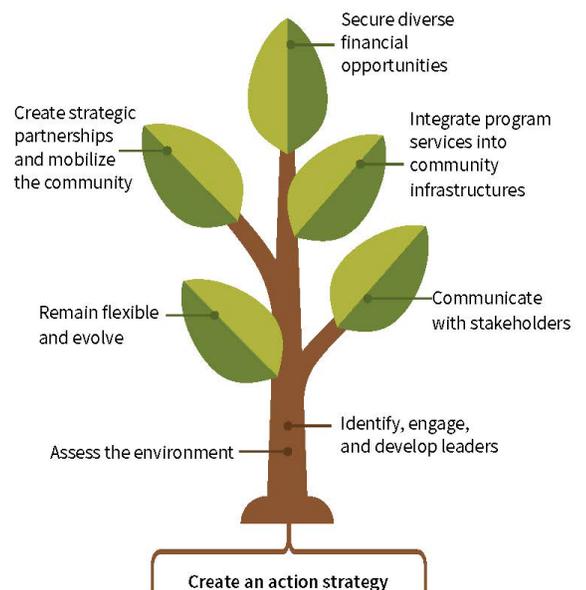
strategy. Sustainability planning, like trees, comes in many different shapes and sizes.

The following section provides details about each factor for program sustainability, for which there are corresponding **seeds to success**; when acted upon, these seeds help projects grow their sustainability efforts.

CREATE AN ACTION STRATEGY

Sustainability is often the last stage to be discussed during program planning. Researchers warn that this delay can lead to the implementation of services that do not anticipate the long-term environment in which they operate.[9] Plan for sustainability early in the life of a program with leadership, staff, partners, and stakeholders.[10] In fact, when possible, consider your sustainability approach *prior to* applying for funding. However, sustainability planning at any stage is valuable and will help chart the program's course.

Create a shared vision of sustainability with partners and community leaders. Weave sustainability planning into larger program work plans and partner agreements. Achieving sustainability requires careful planning and ongoing monitoring of policies, practices, programs, and services to address evolving community needs. Determine what elements should be sustained and how. Develop a living sustainability plan that is re-visited regularly. Write it down. Use a sustainability plan template to help outline a strategy that fits your needs, but be prepared to change it over time. Create guidance to help partners develop and review their own sustainability plans.

Identify who is responsible for carrying it out, and specify goals, objectives, action steps, and a timeline. Of equal importance is being able to measure program or service success. Identify the most appropriate indicators of success and develop a process for collecting data, measuring progress, and incorporating changes based on the data.

ASSESS THE ENVIRONMENT

In planning for sustainability, it is critical to perform an assessment of the internal and external environments. For the internal environment, assess the organization or agency's leadership, staffing, and infrastructure. For the external environment, look at community readiness, local demographics, and existing adolescent health activities or opportunities that might complement the program. This allows grantees to establish their niche within the community while also understanding what else exists or could exist in the community. Assess the financial environment to understand current financial resources such as what funding is available now and what may become available in the future. Analyze the policy environment to help position the program given certain limitations or facilitators. Assessment of both the internal and external environment is critical, and can affect the program or service's ability to achieve its sustainability goals and create long-lasting change.

LEAD

Seeds to Success

- **Identify strong internal leaders**
- **Keep organizational and senior leaders engaged through strategic updates**
- **Identify external community champions**
- **Promote leadership development and shared leadership opportunities**

IDENTIFY, ENGAGE, AND DEVELOP LEADERS

Researchers have found that dedicated and competent leadership is a differentiating factor between programs that are sustained and those that are not.[11] Leaders are extremely important to sustainability, as advocates, resources, or sometimes as barriers. Continuously strive to identify, engage and develop organizational leaders and champions in the community and among partners who exercise initiative, ingenuity, and flexibility to keep the program going.[11] Build a leadership team rather than identifying a single leader to help bolster successes despite staff turnover. When building a team, have a clear vision for team roles, but remain patient and flexible as the team composition changes over time.

Leadership teams can fulfill many important functions, including engaging key stakeholders and finding additional or alternative funders.[12] Shared leadership among internal and external leaders can help develop and communicate the program's mission and goals and chart new paths in the face of shifting community needs. In successful collaborations, leadership roles and responsibilities are distributed among all partners to foster a spirit of shared ownership and group cohesiveness. Learn when to lead and when to let others lead. Identify, engage, and cultivate leaders by creating development opportunities for staff and partners to build their leadership skills. Keep senior and other organizational leaders involved through strategic updates and storytelling. Use the knowledge and skills of current leaders to continually build a cadre of champions and relationships to create larger networks of supporters.

EVOLVE

Seeds to Success

- **Match services offered to community needs and reframe work to new priorities**
- **Plan in advance for staff and leadership changes**
- **Be innovative and find new opportunities; when they come, be prepared**
- **Speak with others to learn about trends**

REMAIN FLEXIBLE AND EVOLVE

A core domain of a public health program's sustainability strategy is its ability to be flexible to ensure effectiveness.[13] Community needs evolve and addressing these needs can be challenging. Adding to that challenge are the often unsteady and fragile financial and policy landscapes in which programs and services operate. Accordingly, it is imperative to be flexible and evolve with a changing climate and remain open to new opportunities.

Be aware of and responsive to environmental changes to withstand challenges while continuously improving programs and services to meet local needs. Reframe work to match new priorities. Plan ahead for staff and leadership changes by having processes in place for a smooth transition. Think beyond the status quo, be innovative, and remain open to opportunities; when new opportunities come, be prepared. Stay up to date on emerging trends, funding priorities, research, and other approaches to help pioneer new and successful

efforts in communities. Speak with leaders in other communities to help assess trends.

COMMUNICATE WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Having a deliberate, tailored, and well-planned communication approach that leverages community assets and partnerships is critical to successful program implementation. An effective communication strategy clearly articulates the program's or service's mission, goals, and successes in a way that resonates with the audience.

Engage community leaders to spearhead efforts around a common cause and use regular meetings as opportunities to communicate the program's successes and enhance your partner network.[14] Know what stories and messages your audience cares about and share them accordingly. Educate key partners and community champions to carry out the program's message to different sectors of the community. Make use of service providers with a similar vision, and leverage relationships with stakeholders knowledgeable about the program services to communicate with your audience. Community buy-in can provide support through a variety of avenues. It may also include developing and disseminating effective messages, success stories and data within and outside of the organization. Create an online presence for the initiative. Ensure current and potential stakeholders can find information easily about the program. Develop its brand and reputation proactively through marketing efforts.

INTEGRATE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES INTO LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Explore opportunities to make activities, services, and programs an integral part of the community and regular activities of a partner organization to ensure their longevity. Look critically at the program's activities and service delivery to identify opportunities to integrate them into the larger infrastructures within the community. Sustainable programs adopt efficient practices during the grant period,[12] such as streamlining management systems, hiring and training additional staff, and developing program materials.[12] Examine the policies, practices, and structures through which programs and services are offered, and consider opportunities to embed them within partner organizations or agencies. This practice can increase their viability and help them move towards replicating practices, programs, and services that can be easily adopted.[15]

The process of integrating efficient and effective policies, practices, and services into the activities of other organizations can facilitate the continuation of

COMMUNICATE

Seeds to Success

- **Formulate a communication approach and message**
- **Collect and share stories regularly**
- **Promote the program and its services**
- **Create an online presence**
- **Encourage program leaders, strategic partners, and community champions to share your message**

INTEGRATE

Seeds to Success

- **Determine which program components could be integrated into other settings**
- **Streamline service delivery, policies, and practices**
- **Integrate programs, services, and practices into the broader community fabric**

grantees' adolescent health services. Capitalizing on the strengths of local partners and their commitment to addressing adolescent health needs, grantees can build capacity to continue their programs, services, and activities in the community.

CREATE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND MOBILIZE THE COMMUNITY

Effective *community mobilization* can bring together partners across different sectors to advocate for your program's goals, support service delivery and advance sustainability efforts.[16,17] *Strategic partnerships* can increase program and service capacity, increase awareness of services, maximize visibility of existing resources, and decrease the likelihood of duplicated efforts. Partners can help grantees learn important lessons about implementation, increase reach to target audiences, and secure additional resources.

An important element of a successful and *effective* partnership is having a shared purpose and vision.[18] Partners with similar program goals can secure diverse funding streams together, leverage communication strategies to build public trust, advance policies that assist parenting and expectant adolescents, and address any recruitment and retention barriers of program participants.[17] Being aware of your organization's strengths and weaknesses is an important step in identifying partners that address any gaps in program service, as well as complement the program's strengths.[18] Cultivating partnerships takes time and effort, and partnerships come in all shapes and sizes: some exist solely for the purposes of dissemination, while others are more cooperative and require memoranda of understanding (MOUs)

> ### PARTNER
>
> ## Seeds to Success
>
> - **Develop strategic partnerships**
> - **Assess existing partnerships continuously**
> - **Establish a shared vision and commitment to sustainability**
> - **Engage partners to help market program successes**
> - **Leverage partner resources**

> ### *How Communication Can Lead to Community Buy-In and Sustainability.*
>
> *A recent experience of an OPA grantee demonstrates the importance of community buy-in. Two school-based programs were recommended for closure due to budget cuts, despite showing several positive impacts on the community, including improved school enrollment, retention, graduation rates and increased student success. The program worked with their leaders, key partners, students, and faculty to garner support for the programs and share their stories on how the programs impacted their own lives and the lives of those in communities they served. Because of the widespread support, the local school systems voted to keep the programs' doors open. Community collaboration and communication was instrumental in the programs' success and the decision to maintain it.*

defining each entity's scope of work. Identifying needs will help in identifying the right opportunities to build lasting and effective partnerships that are mutually beneficial. Build sustainability directly into your partnership agreements. Determine clear goals and objectives for collaborative efforts, and secure partners who are committed to sharing the responsibility of sustaining the program and service efforts. Engage diverse organizations (e.g., faith-based, community based, advocacy groups) and nontraditional partners, which deepens the networks' skill set and knowledge base.[19]

Assess existing and potential partners' strengths and challenges to ensure value. Be willing to have candid conversations. Define benchmarks for the success of a partnership and regularly assess written agreements. Partnership should advance a common goal and help with long-term program sustainability.

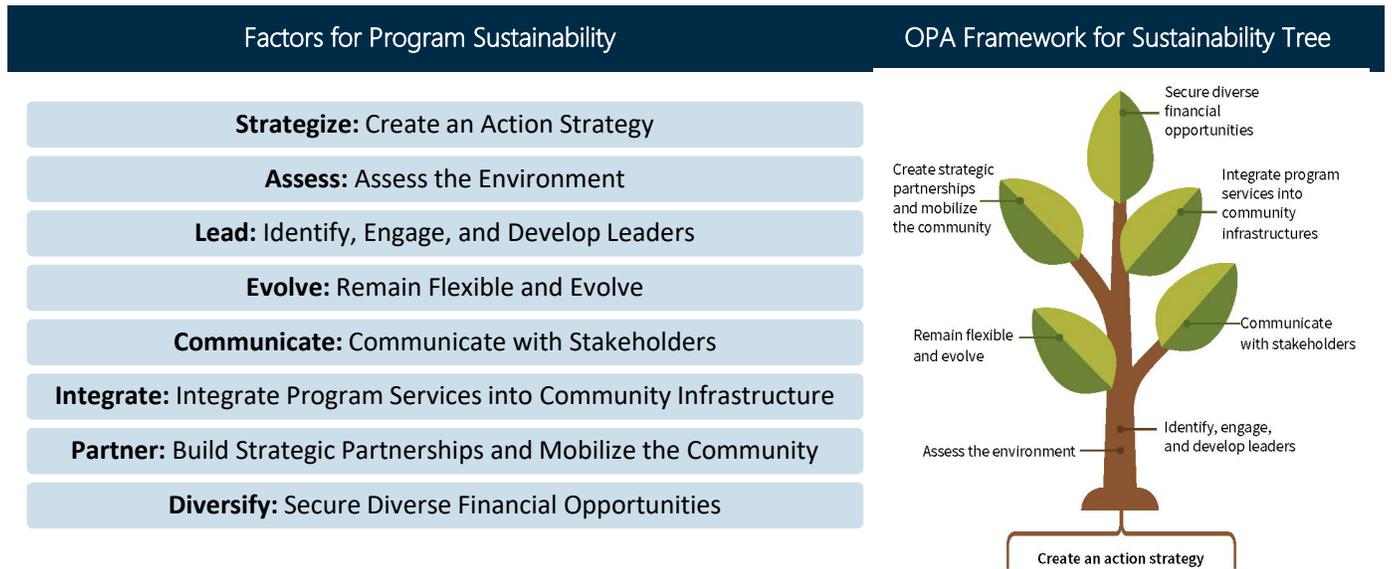## SECURE DIVERSE FINANCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

DIVERSIFY

Seeds to Success

- **Review the program budget to identify core activities and services**
- **Identify and pursue funding opportunities**
- **Create a sustainability planning budgetary line item**
- **Determine what program components could become fee-for-service**
- **Build fundraising and grant-writing capacity**

Diversity of funding sources contributes significantly to sustainability.[11] Programs must understand the local, state, and federal funding environments as well as their own internal capacity.[5] Creating a budgetary line item to address sustainability planning immediately elevates the importance of these efforts by devoting resources to them. Assess how to disburse funds from the agency and how funds might be received from a partner. Setting funding goals from the onset will help you recognize the many ways to diversify funding streams. Targeting a diverse variety of funding opportunities can help grantees adapt to budget cuts and regular fluctuations in funding streams.[12] Grantees should determine what streams or financing structures will work best to meet their needs, as well as consider how or whether their external champions and strategic partners can help. Explore funding streams to match local needs and program requirements. It may help to determine which program components could become part of a fee-for-service model, such as training or other services. Seek out opportunities to build capacity around fundraising and development, which may include hiring or training staff on grant writing or event planning. Grantees may also explore funding options through:

- In-kind resources;
- Local and community foundations;
- Modified organizational financial structures, such as contracting out services, moving services under the umbrella of a community partner, or moving to a fee-for-service model;
- Existing federal, state or local funding through the education system (e.g., state Department of Education) or health care system (e.g., Medicare reimbursement for case management);

- Social enterprise business models;
- Impact investments;
- Pay for Success and Social Impact Bonds;
- Endowments;
- Partnerships with other organizations or programs; and/or
- Other non-traditional funding sources through federal or state health entitlements or initiatives, such as Medicaid or managed health care organizations.

SUMMARY

The OPA Framework for Program Sustainability presented here illustrates that sustainability goes beyond financial security. Program sustainability includes producing benefits within the community and target population that may or may not be dependent on the continuation of a single program or service. The factors for program sustainability discussed are supported by research on the sustainability of social welfare and public health programs as well as the on-the-ground experiences of OPA grantees, and are intended to help grantees effectively leverage their resources to facilitate the continuation of programs, services, and activities that lead to long-lasting improvements in the health and well-being of adolescents. This guide introduces the **OPA Factors for Program Sustainability** and their accompanying **Seeds to Success** to help grantees better prepare, design, and implement a plan for sustainability and to infuse sustainability conversations into their day-to-day practices.

APPENDIX 1: SUMMARY OF THE OPA FRAMEWORK FOR PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY

Factors for Program Sustainability	OPA Framework for Sustainability Tree

Strategize: Create an Action Strategy

Assess: Assess the Environment

Lead: Identify, Engage, and Develop Leaders

Evolve: Remain Flexible and Evolve

Communicate: Communicate with Stakeholders

Integrate: Integrate Program Services into Community Infrastructure

Partner: Build Strategic Partnerships and Mobilize the Community

Diversify: Secure Diverse Financial Opportunities

Secure diverse financial opportunities

Create strategic partnerships and mobilize the community

Integrate program services into community infrastructures

Remain flexible and evolve

Communicate with stakeholders

Assess the environment

Identify, engage, and develop leaders

Create an action strategy

OPA Framework for Sustainability Seeds to Success

STRATEGIZE

- Start planning early
- Create a shared vision with partners and community leaders
- Define sustainability for your program
- Incorporate sustainability activities into daily program operations
- Create a sustainability plan
- Incorporate measures of success into your sustainability plan

ASSESS

- Assess the internal and external environments
- Consider the organizational, financial, and policy environments at the local, state, and national levels
- Embed continuous assessments throughout the life of the program or service
- Use the information to decide what should be sustained

LEAD

- Identify strong internal leaders
- Keep organizational and senior leaders engaged through strategic updates
- Identify external community champions
- Promote leadership development and shared leadership opportunities

EVOLVE

- Match services offered to community needs and reframe work to new priorities
- Plan in advance for staff and leadership changes
- Be innovative and find new opportunities; when they come, be prepared
- Speak with others to learn about trends

COMMUNICATE

- Formulate a communication approach and message
- Collect and share stories regularly
- Promote the program and its services
- Create an online presence
- Encourage program leaders, strategic partners, and community champions to share your message

INTEGRATE

- Determine which program components could be integrated into other settings
- Streamline service delivery, policies, and practices
- Integrate programs, services, and practices into the broader community fabric

PARTNER

- Develop strategic partnerships
- Assess existing partnerships continuously
- Establish a shared vision and commitment to sustainability
- Engage partners to help market program successes
- Leverage partner resources

DIVERSIFY

- Review the program budget to identify core activities and services
- Identify and pursue funding opportunities
- Create a sustainability planning budgetary line item
- Determine what program components could become fee-for-service
- Build fundraising and grant-writing capacity

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REFERENCES

[1] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Population Affairs. Key Resources for TPP Grantees. Retrieved from: https://opa.hhs.gov/grant-programs/teen-pregnancy-prevention-program-tpp/key-resources-tpp-grantees

[2] Hall, T. & Berger, A. (June 2013). Facilitated dialogues with Office of Adolescent Health Teen Pregnancy Prevention grantees.

[3] Chapple, S. & Rackliff, J. (August 2013). Facilitated dialogues with Office of Adolescent Health Pregnancy Assistance Fund grantees.

[4] Johnson, K., Hays, C., Center, H., & Daley, C. (2004). Building capacity and sustainable prevention innovations: A sustainability planning model. Evaluation and Program Planning, 27(2), 135-149.

[5] Weiss, H., Coffman, J., & Bohan-Baker, M. (2002, December). Evaluation's role in supporting initiative sustainability. In fifth biannual meeting of the Urban Seminar Series on Children's Health and Safety, Cambridge, MA. Available at:
http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/pubs/onlinepubs/sustainability/index.html.

[6] McKinsey & Company. (n.d.). Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool. Retrieved from
http://mckinseyonsociety.com/ocat/

[7] Office of Population Affairs. (n.d.). Organizational Capacity Assessment for Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP). Retrieved from https://opa.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/2020-07/organizationalcapacity-assessment.pdf

[8] TCC Group. (n.d.). CCAT. Retrieved from http://www.tcccat.com/

[9] Pluye, P., Potvin, L., Denis, J. L., Pelletier, J., & Mannoni, C. (2005). Program sustainability begins with the first events. Evaluation and Program Planning, 28(2), 123-137.

[10] Cooper, B. R., Bumbarger, B. K., & Moore, J. E. (2015). Sustaining evidence-based prevention programs: Correlates in a large-scale dissemination initiative. Prevention Science, 16(1), 145-157.

[11] Savaya, R., Spiro, S., & Elran-Barak, R. (2008). Sustainability of social programs a comparative case study analysis. American Journal of Evaluation, 29(4), 478-493.

[12] Stevens, B., & Peikes, D. (2006). When the funding stops: Do grantees of the Local Initiative Funding Partners Program sustain themselves? Evaluation and Program Planning, 29(2), 153-161.

[13] Schell, S.F., Luke, D.A., Schooley, M.W., Elliott, M.B., Herbers, S.H., Mueller, N.B., & Bunger, A.C. (2013). Public health program capacity for sustainability: A new framework. Implementation Science, 8:15.

[14] Goldberg, B., Frank, V., Bekenstein, S., Garrity, P., & Ruiz, J. (2011). Successful community engagement: Laying the foundation for effective teen pregnancy prevention. Journal of Children and Poverty, 17(1), 65-86.

[15] Wolff, T. (2010). Tools for Sustainability. Global Journal for Community Psychology Practice, 1(1), 40-57.

[16] Huberman, B., Klaus, T., & Davis, L. (2014). Strategies guided by best practice for community mobilization. Washington, DC: Advocates for Youth. Retrieved from
https://www.hhs.gov/ash/OPA/sites/default/files/strats-guided-by-best-practices.pdf

[17] Klaus, T. W., & Saunders, E. (2016). Using collective impact in support of communitywide teen pregnancy prevention initiatives. *Community Development*, 47(2), 241-258.

[18] John Snow, Inc. (2012). Engaging your community: a toolkit for partnership, collaboration, and action. Available at:
http://www.jsi.com/JSIInternet/Inc/Common/_download_pub.cfm?id=14333&lid=3

[19] Hanson, H.M. & Salmoni, A.W. (2011). Stakeholder's perceptions of programme sustainability: Findings from a community-based fall prevention programme. *The Journal of Public Health*, *125*, 525-532.