

## WEBINAR VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

# Developing Your Sustainability Plan

## Sustainability Webinar Series Part 1

16 May 2019

SALINA TEWOLDE: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Salina Tewolde, and I'd like to welcome you to The Path to Program Sustainability Webinar Series, Developing Your Sustainability Plan. This TA call is brought to you by the Office of Adolescent Health. I would now like to introduce today's presenter, Sharon Vardatira. Sharon Vardatira is the director of non-profit funding and fiscal solutions at the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute. Sharon, the floor is yours.

SHARON VARDATIRA: Thank you. So just a little-- hi, everyone. Welcome. I'm excited to be doing this and to be able to talk to you all about sustainability, one of my favorite topics. So just a little bit about us-- the Donahue Institute is the public service arm of the UMass president's office.

Think of us as a mid-sized consulting firm, and our division serves nonprofits of all sizes from small grassroots startups to large multimillion dollar national, international organizations. We work with all different kinds of folks in those organizations from leadership teams to boards to managers, middle managers, fund development, staff, community members, and we actually also are starting up-- have started up a national nonprofit sustainability center, where we do work specifically focused around sustainability writ large. It's a very broad topic.

Some of you may remember us from our work as OAH's provider of community mobilization and sustainability capacity building assistance-- it's quite a mouthful-- to OAH teen pregnancy prevention grantees in FY 2017. So we were that capacity building provider.

So I personally have been working with non-profits for over 30 years now, and one of the questions I commonly get is what degree you need to enter this field. Most folks think that I need to have been formally trained in fund development or business, but maybe surprisingly, but probably like many of you, I first came into the non-profit sector through volunteering on issues I care about. My earliest experience was working on a suicide hotline, actually, which maybe puts me in a good place to be talking about such high stakes things as fund development and sustainability.

I learned early on an important thing, which was to stay calm and keep breathing. That's actually a golden rule for scuba divers, and I think it also works for anyone in the non-profit fund development and sustainability field these days. So stay calm, and keep breathing. Here

we go. I will try not to race through this. I tend to go quickly, but anyway, I'm going to stay calm, too.

This is the first of four webinars in this summer sustainability webinar series. As I'm sure you're all aware by now, the OAH framework for achieving sustainability outlines eight factors that are intrinsic to effective sustainability planning and sustaining programs. As you can see, each of the webinars looks in depth at some of these specific factors.

Today, for example, we're honing in on factor one, create an action strategy, factor three, identify, engage, and develop leaders, and factor four, remain flexible and evolve. Not surprisingly, some of these factors repeat in different webinars. For example, remain flexible and evolve is core to many aspects of sustainability, as you can see and as we will be talking about.

So before I jump right in, it would be really helpful to know how much sustainability work you're all doing or have done, so we're going to conduct a poll right now. You have a multiple choice question in front of you, so just check off which of these statements is most true for your organization. So how much sustainability work have you done? A, not much beyond the original proposal. B, currently working on the plan, but have not yet completed it. C, completed our plan. And completed our plan and are now implementing action steps. So go ahead and vote. I'll take a second, and then we will see the results.

OK, this is exciting. People are in different places. Some of you haven't done much beyond the original proposal, which doesn't surprise me at all, although I think some of you are fairly into your program. So the good news here is that you can jump in and start doing this work at any point. I always think it's good to start early, but at any point, it's important to get into it. So those of you who've completed your plan and are now implementing action steps, I think there will be some new things in here that you maybe haven't thought of, so that will be, hopefully, as helpful for you as well.

So just to go over quickly, the objectives of this webinar are to provide you with a basic introduction to sustainability planning. But I think you've probably done that a few many times, so I also want to go beyond that to provide you with some real world examples of organizations and programs that have engaged in some form of sustainability planning. And I've selected three organizations to look at in depth that have been around for a while, so you can hear not only how they approach sustainability, but also what happened to them as a result of doing that work.

I think you won't be surprised to hear that sort of by the book sustainability planning rarely works for most organizations. It's a good place to start, but you have to move on from there. So in this webinar, I'm actually going to try to pull back the curtain on how different sustainability planning can be in the real world. This is a quote from Aesop's Fables that would seem to capture the essence of what sustainability is all about. "It's best to prepare ahead."

But the story behind this quote is actually a little more nuanced and goes something like this. A fiddle-playing grasshopper, that you can see there, happens upon some ants preparing for winter. He begs the ants for some of the food they are storing. The ants chide the grasshopper for not having prepared. "Go on and dance," they tell him, and they don't give him any food, actually. And the moral of the story is this. It is best to prepare for the day as a necessity.

But here is the problem with this concept of sustainability, I find. Who would you most like to hang out or be in this story? If we're honest, almost all of us would prefer to be the fun-loving grasshopper rather than the industrious kind of stern ants. And unfortunately, when we think about long-term sustainability, fund development, and getting community support, we start to see ourselves and the work more like kind of the grind of gathering for winter than playing a fiddle. So I applaud all of you who have come here, because sometimes when we hear things like sustainability, it's like, oh, that may not be so interesting.

But in fact, the good news here is that promoting sustainability can bring about some of your most gratifying moments, not just in the future, but also now. Getting community members excited about what you do in your program, getting that big grant, being rewarded and recognized-- these all feel amazing. So as you work on sustainability now and in the future, I promise you're going to grow to love this side of non-profit development, and your organizations are going to be better not just in the long term, but also immediately right now.

Sustainability can mean different things in different contexts to different organizations, so you're going to hear that over and over again here. To some, it's simply a continuity of services, the ability to basically carry on through funding and resource shifts or losses. Sustainability can include a whole slew of things from institutionalizing and integrating services, adapting to constant changes in the environment, technology policies, funding streams, whatever. Creating a legacy-- that could be sustainability. Sharing positive outcomes to get local buy-in and provide high quality services.

For OAH, sustainability, which is that first block there, is defined as the ability to 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. This is, for sure, a really broad statement that is likely to be applicable to most of your programs or at least your OAH-supported programs. But maybe not even all of those-- for example, if you're part of a demonstration project or a complex evaluation initiative, it's possible that your definition of sustainability would be more about disseminating findings or possibly establishing a new evidence-based model, not simply just to continue the program you're currently implementing.

Thus, while it's important to understand how OAH defines sustainability, if this definition doesn't capture your vision for the future, come up with something that applies to your program. I have noticed in doing this work that sometimes sustainability and sustainability planning are used interchangeably, almost as though the expectation is that simply doing the planning will lead to sustainability. I'm sorry to say that isn't true. In fact, just like any action plan that you develop, sustainability planning will hopefully get you closer to your goals, but

you can go through all the steps and not necessarily end up realizing your sustainability goal, whatever that may be.

And just like with any action plan you undertake, if you don't realize your goals, you may need to adjust your tasks and activities to get you to that end goal, or sometimes you even have to change the goal. And I will have some examples of that as we go forward.

So why does sustainability matter? It may seem obvious, but to different entities here, it matters for different reasons. To funders, they really want to maximize the impact of their contributions and grants. They want a return on their investment, something we're hearing a lot about these days. In short, they want to make a difference beyond the present moment or that one grant that they give out. They want to know that that grant's going to go on somehow.

To organizations, well, they want to be able to realize their mission and to move beyond putting out fires and scrambling to address sort of last minute emergencies, funding emergencies. So that's why sustainability matters to organizations. And to participants, to the community that you serve, sustainability actually builds stability, addresses the needs of participants over the long term, it builds community and the community's sense of being able to come together to make a difference.

I have an example of where sustainability-- what mattered didn't actually happen in the way it was planned for. But about 10 years ago, I was part of an evaluation team looking at the impact of a new teen center on an urban, largely disadvantaged community. The center was funded through a five-year federal SAMHSA grant and included recreational equipment, renovation of an abandoned downtown building, mentoring and health-focused programs, workforce development programs, all kinds of bells and whistles.

Youth led the renovation planning. They painted the facility. They set up a peer mentor program. It was beyond inspiring and really cool and very exciting for the community. But at the end of year three, the agency was pretty much-- the lead agency who was running this was pretty much set on getting just another SAMHSA grant to keep it going, and no matter what we, the evaluators, said or SAMHSA said about how they should leverage partners or do a full-blown sustainability plan, they just weren't that interested. They figured, we're running an incredible program, and we'd show SAMHSA that that's the case. They'll fund it.

So the grant program ended after five years, and to the shock and disappointment of the youth participants, in particular, who did not see it coming, the whole thing just shut down. The takeaway for just about everyone in the community was something along the lines of, we can't have nice things. Everything ends up being shut down. And frankly, that takeaway was actually worse than had the teen center not existed in the first place.

Not having sustainable programs actually reinforces a community's sense of instability and impermanence and inability to move forward. So yeah, it matters.

I sometimes play the part of reality check consultant, and that's what I'm doing here. But I wanted to mention the Oscars for a moment. You may think I'm taking a left turn here, but if you pay attention to the Oscars, you will know that one of this year's Oscar-nominated documentary shorts, called *End Game*, focused on the Zen Hospice Project in San Francisco, where teams of medical professionals and counselors work with patients and their families in a wonderful homelike setting to deliver compassionate end of life care.

Having a Hollywood-produced movie that really shows the impact of our work is the sort of thing that most nonprofits can only frankly dream about. Just think of the donations that would come in if your group had access to that kind of publicity. I saw the movie myself. I'll admit, it was super intense and somewhat depressing, but being in fund development, I also imagine that this movie had to be pure gold for the Zen Hospice Project.

And then a few months ago, I came across a New York Times article about Zen Hospice. Apparently, last year, after three decades in existence, the organization closed. It's worth keeping in mind that even when everything seems to be going for a non-profit, most nonprofits close within six to 15 years of starting, a statistic that I found actually shockingly short. When talking about sustainability, we often focus on money-- how to keep getting it, how to get more of it, how not to lose it.

In fact, the things that get in the way of sustainability have so much more to do with other issues-- sometimes growing too much, which was the issue for Zen Hospice, and not attending to things that keep programs and organizations strong, like infrastructure and commitment to mission, staff, making sure everyone's happy, and you don't have people running out the door as soon as they're trained-- continuous improvement. So sustainability relies on all of those things.

In the end, sustainability might just mean morphing and transforming it into something else. In the case of Zen Hospice, the story isn't all bad. Not only do we have the documentary to provide a vision of a different way to support the dying, but according to the New York Times article, one other key element of Zen Hospice has continued, namely, the director has continued to deliver the mindful caregiving training that took place at the house and other locations throughout San Francisco. That is a form of sustainability.

The goal with sustainability is to plan for what comes next, not simply hang on to whatever is possible. And as for that adage there, if money can't fix it, it's not the problem, that's just a way of reminding you that if money were the only thing that were getting in the way, you probably wouldn't have money being the problem. So lots of people come to us for help, and they may think that what they need is a grant or something else. And we discover along the way that it's actually other weaknesses that have contributed to them being in the position of really scrambling to get money. So you can reflect on that for a while.

So this will look familiar to you, I think. And I mentioned this earlier, but I wanted to revisit the eight factors one more time. These provide a foundation from which you build your

sustainability plan. In OAH's vision of sustainability, the factors for program sustainability come together to form this tree-like structure. The factor, create an action strategy, represents the roots of sustainability with other factors like assessing the environment and identifying, engaging, and developing leaders, forming the trunk of the tree, and creating a solid base for sustainable activities to grow.

The other factors represent branches and leaves of a tree, lengthening or contracting, growing or falling away as needed. The factors may occur simultaneously. It's not necessarily a linear thing. And you may prioritize certain factors over others, depending on your specific needs and goals. But I think maybe the most important reason to see this as a tree is that like trees, sustainability plans and sustainability planning comes in many different shapes and sizes. So there you go. It's the tree analogy. We will see that pop up periodically here.

These are the basic by-the-book steps in sustainability planning. They're laid out in kind of a linear fashion, because they're 1 through 9, so you usually think of starting at 1, although it doesn't actually have to start at number one. And like I said earlier, it's never too late to start. So ideally, sustainability planning is a fluid, continuous process, and you will adapt these steps to form your own strategy. But just that said, let's start at the top.

Before the planning process even starts, you want to assemble your internal leadership team, the group that's going to drive this forward. And you very well often recruit outside community members to that planning committee. That isn't always the case, but it often is the case and is certainly considered a best practice. And then you assess your environment, and that can be internal, external. Our next webinar looks at that in some depth.

And then once you have done that pre-planning work, you begin the planning. And the planning begins with coming up with your vision for the program's future. What do we want this to look like in the future? You integrate your assessment findings into that vision. Prioritize what you want to sustain. Establish your budget and resources. This is all very clear and straightforward, right?

Each of these is obviously some amount of work, and then identify the feasibility of different fundraising strategies. And finally, once you've done all that sort of background research and figured out where you want to go, you come up with your action plan, which are the goals and the methods and the action steps and the timeline and who's going to do what. So in the end, the sustainability plan should look just like any other action plan you have, only it's really focused on that particular issue sustaining the organization and driving that vision forward.

And I want to say, I think there was some discussion on that prior slide about going over the steps of sustainability planning in some detail. But a lot of you are already into it, and there's certainly many resources out there that OAH has provided on how to execute those steps. So what OAH really wanted us to focus on when we did this webinar was examples, thinking that examples of folks who've done this might be really helpful for you to sort of compare and contrast and see how differently that can be approached.

So through much of the rest of this webinar, we're going to be examining three real world examples, actual organizations, to see how each of them approached in their own different ways. Factor 1, creating the action strategy, sustainability plan. Factor 3, building leadership teams, and factor 4, being flexible and evolving. So just to introduce you a little bit to the three organizations we're looking at, the first organization here or program, I should say, really, because it wasn't an organization. The Teen Outreach Program in Connecticut was a federally funded demonstration teen pregnancy prevention program from 2010 to 2015.

The program focused on delivering the nine-month TOP model, Teen Outreach Program, to kids in care, by which I mean teens, ages 14 to 19, for this program whose lives have been affected by severe family problems, abuse, emotional, developmental, and behavioral difficulties, and who were receiving services through residential special education, foster care, and community programs.

The second organization, the Care Center, is an educational and comprehensive support group program, providing services to primarily Latina, pregnant, and parenting young mothers, ages 16 to 21, and their babies. All of them live in poverty. All are school dropouts. The Care Center was funded through a federal care demonstration grant from FY 2003 to 2007, which was administered by the Office of Adolescent Family Life, which was the precursor to OAH, or I should say existed before the Office of Adolescent Health was established.

And a third program here, Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools, also known as Rethink, was founded in 2006 after Hurricane Katrina to amplify the voices of New Orleans middle schoolers in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. It was originally established as a youth engagement, youth voice program, and has evolved over the years since then into a true youth leadership organization with a strong commitment to social justice.

It never did receive federal funds, but I included it here, because it shows an innovative planning example and how an organization can thrive and evolve and sustain without federal funding, surprisingly enough. So we're going to look at each of the factors, so it's going to be factor 1, and we're going to look at each of the three organizations and how they approach factor 1.

So starting with factor 1, creating an action strategy, TOP in Connecticut faced a number of challenges that were unique to the program itself, and I'm betting a number of you are going to recognize these challenges. Initially, the sustainability goal for TOP in Connecticut was for the core partners to continue offering the top clubs for kids in care across the state. Remember, this was a demonstration program, but once they started doing it, it was like, wouldn't this be nice if it just kept going? However, implementing that sustainability plan was not so straightforward.

First, because the program was delivered through several large statewide social service providers, there was no obvious external stakeholder community that had an interest in advancing outcomes for this particular group of young people. It was pretty much the staff that

had an interest in continuing it. Think about it for a moment. Public fundraisers don't tend to be set up for high needs youth with behavioral or emotional challenges, or another way to say this is that this population doesn't naturally evoke lots of sympathy.

So what about the families of these young kids? Would they be natural allies? Well, actually not so much. The families of these kids, if they were involved at all, usually didn't want to advertise their situation, and most of them were somewhat disconnected, and many of them were very disadvantaged. So the population of kids in care is largely hidden from the public, and that makes it a hard population to do a lot of community mobilization around, as you can imagine. So families, the general public, and even funders were poor prospects for engaging in sustainability planning or mobilizing and support of these young people.

So when we met with-- and I was part of a sort of fund development sustainability planning consultant brought in. When I met with the principal partners to start the sustainability planning process, we also learned something else, which was while the partners were more than happy to run the programs and very much hoped to get continuation funding from OAH, they weren't so enthusiastic about TOP that they felt like this had to continue at all costs. They thought, hm, there might be other TPP programs that could also be effective and maybe would require less work on their part.

And so the other problem was that TOP had a nine-month model at that point, and that didn't work out for many of the participants who tended to leave the program sometimes before the nine months was up. So they also needed an adaptation to deliver the TOP model in half that time, really. As a group, we still wanted to do sustainability planning with them, and we did a few things to address these challenges and to move that forward.

First, we had to really dig into the data coming out of the model and to demonstrate to the internal stakeholders, so the organizations that we were working with, just how effective the model was with their youth. And it was. They were really changed. For example, there's a community engagement piece of the model. The youth really appreciated that. And the model was really highly effective at addressing multiple risks, not just preventing pregnancy.

So for this higher-need population, that was especially important. And so that was the first thing was to get the internal stakeholders, the people, our partners really on board with the model. And second, we just proceeded to go through, and you'll see this is just a little piece of the planning questions that we asked at our first sustainability meeting. We went through the planning process with the key staff that we'd assembled, who were some very enthusiastic managers, some program staff, some people who had run the clubs. We followed the step-by-step action planning process as much as we could to identify where they had the potential to leverage support.

We identified potentially doing collaborative fundraising with the other partners and maybe even getting Connecticut DCF involved, because wouldn't they like this model? And even if the

state of Connecticut's DCF wasn't interested in pursuing the model, we came to realize that there might be some other states that would be.

Moving on to The Care Center, and you'll hear what happened as a result of this as we go through here. But again, sticking with the sort of factor 1, creating an action strategy-- The Care Center had this awesome five-year demonstration project, which brought a lot of money in and enabled them to do something that they thought would be very impactful with the young people. So I want to say first, their sustainability goal was to build on the success of that project and to, essentially, transform their local culture and thinking about the potential for young mothers to advance to higher education. So they were in a community, which was kind of like, this is the outcome for young Latina women who get pregnant. Maybe they get their GED. Maybe they get a job somewhere. Probably they don't do so well. And in fact, that was what was happening.

So the Care Center-- they didn't feel satisfied with having young women graduate out of the program, some of them with their GEDs, into a life of poverty. And they felt like, we need to do something more. We need to get these young women to start thinking about higher education, which will really change the trajectory of their outcomes. The model that they were proposing, which was funded by the federal government, was basically designed to jumpstart the education of young mothers who had dropped out of school by engaging them in extracurricular activities.

They thought, if it works in a prep school, why would these young women not also like that sort of thing? So they put in front of them art, athletics, humanities, alongside the basic GED program. And in fact, adding these basic prevention strategies was wildly successful. Just to give you one example, before New Directions, which was the name of the demonstration program, under 5% of their graduates each year considered college. A few applied. Maybe one went. And after New Directions, between 75% and 80% of their graduates each year advanced to college. That was huge.

And even so, in terms of creating a sustainability plan or action strategy, The Care Center faced its own set of challenges. The first was they'd had this huge federal grant. Now where were they going to get money? Even though it was successful, that's a lot of money. I think it was like \$350,000 a year, so that was a lot to make up.

They also had, oddly, especially at the beginning of the program, some internal resistance to the approach. Like this is all well and fine giving these young women all these fancy, fun art, sports things. But really, they're moms now. They need to buckle down. They need to get jobs. We can't be messing around and having them do this. And in the community, there was also these expectations. This is not what young Latino mothers do in our community. They don't get this sort of extra thing. This is not right.

And it didn't appear that there were any natural allies out there who were kind of board with this. The solutions, though, were, first, to find and engage those natural allies, educators and

fundors with a deep stake in helping disadvantaged youth succeed in school and access higher education. And they are out there.

There are a lot of funders who want to do that. They didn't require that those allies get involved in creating sort of that action plan. They didn't make them sit down and say, step one, we're now going to assess the community. But they knew that they were out there, and they thought there would be ways to engage those allies in doing the things that they were really excited to do. And I'm going to talk about that a little later.

They also disseminated their new knowledge, the evaluation findings, internally to their participants and their families and especially to their skeptical or once skeptical staff. And I remember sitting there, because I was part of the evaluation team, and the staff sort of being amazed to see the attendance difference. Like they thought there was a change in attendance. They didn't realize how massive it was. So that was pretty exciting and got everyone internally very much on board. And then hearing about that success also had a major effect on the public.

So The Care Center celebrated that success in an ongoing public relations blitz. Strategic communications, if you will, became a real big part of that sustainability strategy. Rethink, a different program altogether, was born in the spring after Hurricane Katrina. It was founded by one community media organizer, a communications activist who realized that giving youth a megaphone would attract attention to the problems in the schools, which were deemed some of the worst in the country, even before Katrina hit.

So she saw that moment as an opportunity to do something about the schools, which would soon be rebuilt. And she realized that young people would get the attention of policymakers in a way that no one else could. The program started small. That first summer, maybe a dozen youth participated, but it had a big impact right from the get-go. The model worked like this.

The middle school students who were attending had-- it was a summer day program, and the whole summer day program started with a facilitative visioning session, where youth envisioned the schools of their dreams. That was followed by youth describing amongst themselves what their current reality was, and then doing research to come up with meaningful proposals for what they wanted to see changed. Then they planned for an end of summer press conference, where they would present their proposals to policymakers, schools, news media, the public in a very well-staged press conference.

Youth received training on how to do that. They did all the presentations. These are middle school youth. And they answered all the media's questions and spoke with decision makers. So you can probably imagine the impact in that first year of having young people, many of whom had just returned to New Orleans from places around the country that they'd been evacuated to, ask for things like books that they wouldn't have to share, doors on their bathrooms, toilet paper in the stalls, and other basics that most schools take for granted.

So that first year, and in the second year, it was mind-blowingly successful. It was like you could just ask anyone for money, and money would come. I was doing fund development at the time for them, so I had that experience. There was huge media coverage from local news to Nickelodeon, followed by very generous private grants and contributions. But after those first few years, sustainability became a different challenge. Some of the challenges-- the hurricane was past news. Funders are now looking elsewhere. We've given you money for this. The community was still very much in disarray, fractured. These were kids from the Lower Ninth Wards. I don't remember what they were called, but the area that was most devastated by the hurricane.

And so those natural allies that they might have had, other youth organizations were very dispersed and also just disorganized to some degree. But what was true about the Rethink model and why I think it's an important thing to consider for a moment was in some very concrete ways, sustainability was baked into the structure of the entire program. Every summer after that first year, the participants established a new vision and reformulated their primary focus.

For example, in the first year, it was doors on the bathrooms and things like that. In a subsequent year, it was a green, environmentally green school bathrooms, restorative justice in place of zero tolerance policies in the schools, support programs for young parents in the schools, school lunches made with locally sourced foods, including preparing iconic and healthy New Orleans dishes instead of like hot dogs and fries that you might have.

So every year, they rolled out new proposals that were exciting and interesting and often tapped into different funders' interests. I remember when they rolled out the locally grown foods, it turned out Ford Foundation was looking at local foods in schools at that time and jumped on board with the big grant. So the model was self-sustaining, and the funding kind of followed that. Every year after the press conference, youth engaged with community partners, business schools, legislators, funders, and the media saw something happening, and they wanted to get on board. So in a very basic way, youth speaking directly to what they saw in their communities and how to fix it was really inspiring.

How did our three programs ultimately engage and develop leaders? And I'm going to go over this pretty quickly, because I think I touched on it. So in TOP in Connecticut, we didn't even try to engage those more traditional things that you see talked about in sustainability planning. There wasn't going to be a community advisory group or a youth advisory council. That wasn't the program for this.

But they did engage the principal organizational partners, staff, managers, the coordinating organization, and the provider sites where the clubs were located. So that became a big part of it, the group that was doing the actual work. The Care Center took a bit of a non-traditional route as well to establishing the leadership group. So the planning team was made up of the board, key staff and consultants, and designated youth from the program who were kind of youth leaders. They did it that way, because they really wanted to maintain control over the

message and the sustainability plan, and they felt that the best way to do that was to keep that action plan in house.

At the same time, the news coverage they had gotten engendered a lot of excitement, and people in the community were coming forward. They wanted to help. What can we do? So The Care Center established what you might think of as a community advisors team, essentially an ever-expanding group of people-- think educators, public business, local business owners, funders-- that served, ultimately, as emissaries for The Care Center.

They would bring them in. Once every quarter, they held-- they still do this to this day-- hold an open session for the public where anyone can come in. They introduce the program. They invite attendee-- here's our program. Listen to our youth speak. What do you think about this?

They would really invite feedback and suggestions and recommendations. And they also asked them, who else do you think might be interested in this program that would want to support it? So it's kind of like an advisor, but also a fund development strategy at the same time.

So it was like an extended family, and once a year, everyone gets together for a big celebration and fundraiser. This is a picture from this year's fundraiser. There's like 400 or 500 people at this thing. And there are students doing speeches, amazing speeches, which are very inspiring. So they basically do this. They foster a culture of philanthropy and a sustainable model for engaging a wider community and the work of The Care Center. And that's how they engage leaders.

They, early on, recognize that these advisors, these other people, the public people, the really core of their support had absolutely no interest in being part of action planning. They were going to sit down, and who's responsible for this in the timeline? But they did have an interest in providing input and acting on behalf of The Care Center.

I actually was doing strategic planning with a whole different organization at one time, and someone from The Care Center's group here happened to be in the planning process and kept bringing up The Care Center as an example of, you might want to think about doing this. The Care Center over here has done it this way, and it's been really effective. And I realized in that moment just how powerful it was to have these people out there speaking on your behalf and sort of singing your praises often and far and wide.

Finally, Rethink also has a different model for engaging leaders. First, as you've gathered by now, the youth participants are the leadership and planning team. The adults definitely provide support. They're in there. They're facilitating their training, and that has changed over the years. So in the beginning, it was started by one woman who is a professional media consultant. But at this point now, it's run by young adults, some of whom have come through the program. And so it's very much a youth-led organization at this point. And that's a compelling story in itself.

But it's important to keep in mind that there are these other entities around the Rethink youth. And for example, one year, the year that they were doing the green bathrooms, they actually engaged with an architectural firm in New Orleans who donated all their time to helping train the young people on how to build architectural models of bathrooms that they then used at their press conference. They have the adults, and the people around them have very meaningful roles. And like The Care Center, because the program is kind of amazing, people are very eager to help out. All you have to do, really, is ask.

I wanted to go to factor 4, how these programs evolved and remain flexible over time. TOP in Connecticut-- sustainability in that conventional sense of just keeping the programs going was not feasible. In fact, that probably shouldn't have ever been the sustainability goal for TOP in Connecticut. Ultimately, the program was designed to explore the effectiveness of the model with kids in care. So for a program like TOP in Connecticut, sustainability goals should have been focused on things like lessons learned and dissemination of findings.

They did continue a few of the TOP clubs. After the federal grant, they were integrated into ongoing programs and some of those provider agencies, but ultimately, the group evolved to focus on these different sustainability, these different and more appropriate sustainability goals. So some of the things they did-- they actually-- the program drove adaptation of the model. There is now a four-month model out there for working with specific populations of youth, where that makes the most sense.

They definitely used evaluation to persuade the internal stakeholders, the staff, and the people in those agencies about how this was valuable, which is why it ever got integrated into those programs. It was integrated, as you can see, into some of those programs. And then they also disseminated some of the lessons learned, and the links here-- there's a YouTube video all about it, and then there's also a report that goes into some depth about what it was to do that work. So that is a form of sustainability that was appropriate for that model.

The Care Center's mantra-- I think the Care Center's mantra is basically, do whatever it takes just to see that our students succeed, was the driving force behind the program's evolution over the years. Every time they hit an obstacle, they tried to figure out how to solve that problem. And evaluation and continuous improvement is really at the core of their program evolution.

At the start of the federal demonstration project 16 years ago, they had this plan to incorporate humanities, arts, sports into the basic GED program. And I should say, coupled with that was comprehensive family supports like child care, meals, parenting classes, case management, transportation, anything to remove those barriers to participation. By the end of the five-year federal program, they had begun offering college credit classes and a college bridge program, and they added onsite mental health and health care along with college application support. And in 2016, jumping about a decade after the federally funded program, they launched Bard Microcollege Holyoke, the first in the nation accredited two-year associate's degree program at The Care Center. And they're soon going to be adding housing, residential facility.

When asked what is key to The Care Center's sustainability-- and I said to the director, what is key to The Care Center's sustainability, she said, be brave. Be bold. Carpe diem while you have the federal grant. Effective and inspired programs get funded. I think that's a really important thing here to remember, because a lot of people-- you're talking about program, not sustainability. In fact, good programs, strong programs, convincing, persuasive, effective programs can be used to leverage money. That is in money and other resources and community support.

It also helps, of course, that they use the press to talk about their work. They engage community advisors on being ambassadors for the program. And they shift that funder program dynamic, sort of the us and them thing, to one that is more about collaborating and partnering together. Rethink has also undergone a transformation, as you probably have gathered. They also prove the point that effective and inspired programs that capitalize on media get funded.

So they started in 2006 with this summer program for middle schoolers. A few years later, they got that Ford Foundation grant, which expanded them from a summer only program to a year-round program, which ran Rethink clubs in almost all the New Orleans schools. And today, some 13 years later, they are like truly youth-led, engaging young people in two ways. They have a group-- the Rethink clubs still exist for younger youth of color, ages 10 to 14, where they basically do that thinking critically about social and political issues in relation to school and education. They use culture, discussions, action research to develop pathways for change. And the summer program continues from that very first model in much the same way as it did then.

They also now have an older division, a division for older youth, ages 15 to 22, because, of course, the middle schoolers who aged out wanted to keep engaged. And they get together to address a specific issue related to Rethink's platform, which is currently focused on education equity, food and land justice, and transformative justice with no police or prisons.

One of the things OAH thought might be helpful to you would be to see an example of a sustainability plan. And I'm not going to go through this in detail, but the next five slides are basically a sustainability plan. And what I want to say is they would look very different, depending on who's doing this, obviously. So if we look at the three organizations we've just been looking at, first, this plan is kind of supported.

It leads with a fund development goal that's supported by community mobilization and other fundraising activities. But for, let's say, TOPIC, The Teen Outreach Program In Connecticut, their plan would probably be less reliant on community mobilization and more reliant on joint fundraising and, in particular, combining the programs and integrating them into existing services. And they would also have goals and activities around disseminating and adapting the model for use in the field.

For The Care Center, the fundraising goal might be similar to one you'd see here, but there'd be significantly more emphasis on individual donor giving combined with private foundation grants. And also, a key component would be utilization of community members-- donors,

foundations, as well as major communications and outreach and visibility in the community. And finally, for Rethink, there would be significantly more emphasis on justice outcomes and change-making, community mobilization and action, and community media organizing, and leveraging partners in other regions and across the country.

Just wanted to note here, you'll see in red, this is where updates and progress notes are made about what's happening. This is when a plan becomes useful is when you can actually use it to-- what kind of progress are we making? And then assess how you might need to change it if you're not making enough progress or hitting your goals. And we can just go through the next slides just one, two, three.

You'll see these are each pages, different methods and goals. This one sort of falls more into creation of outreach and written materials. This is a whole other strategy being leveraged here-- fee for service work. And often, strategies have multiple purposes. So in this case, fee for service leverages revenue, but it also establishes this group as an expert and leader in their field.

I wanted to leave enough time for questions. Completing your action plan-- don't forget you need to obtain authorization, identify the support or capacity-- CBA, capacity building assistance you might need, finalizing getting stakeholder buy-in, and this dog looks like-- this dog, Stella, at the top of the Continental Divide trail looks like she's finished her work. But of course, she has to get somewhere else from this point. And that's the truth of the matter is you may have the plan, but then it has to be about activating the plan and doing the steps and following through.

This is the sustainability resources that you've all seen at the OAH site, and questions? I'd love to get some questions and hear what you're thinking.

SALINA TEWOLDE: Thank you so much, Sharon. As a reminder, if you would like to submit a question, please type your question into the chat box. So we have a question from Jordan, and it says, can you go back to page 2 of the sample timeline?

SHARON VARDATIRA: Yes. Was there a particular question around that, or you just wanted to see it? I also-- I think that you'll be getting this timeline as a separate document like a Word document, so you can really dig in. I just want to point out, this is your basic action plan. This should look really familiar to you. It's got your method and your goals, and then primary, secondary activities, who's going to do it, and a timeline. So there's nothing mysterious about this plan. It just focuses on sustainability activities that will drive sustainability. Any questions about that?

And you can see this as an actual plan. I Jane Doed it so that the organization did not have to answer to the strategies that it came up with at that point. But yeah, these are real things that were done.

SALINA TEWOLDE: So we have a question from Tristan. Could you speak more to the role of strategic communications and the context of sustainability? It seems like a consistent thread throughout the case studies you shared.

SHARON VARDATIRA: It is, I think, an essential part, so any time you are doing-- I'll just go straight to, say, fund development-- one of the important aspects of it, if you want to leverage money in the community from private donors or foundations is what your reputation is in the community, what the community knows about you. And so often, when I'm doing a sustainability plan and that assessment piece, so that step where you assess your organization, internal-external factors, often, that's, how do people perceive you in the community? Because that has a lot to do with whether they recognize you as an institution to give money to, whether they know what you do.

I was working with an organization that ran a number of programs, and when we got to that piece and were doing that assessment, they had to honestly note that they were known for one program, which happened to be their nurturing fathers program. But they ran a ton of other community programs that people didn't know about. Did that matter? Was that a problem?

Well, it was a problem if they were trying to put forth their other things and get support for it. So how you communicate who you are, your brand, your messaging is very closely tied to leveraging resources. And it's always an integral part of the picture. So the two programs I use-- so Rethink was actually developed by someone who was in communications. So as you probably saw, it was all about communications. But it worked massively to their advantage.

The Care Center was not actually a big into communications organization. They're kind of like, we'll just put our head down and do our work. But when these results started coming through, they realized that there was something exciting happening here, and they wanted people to know about it. And they felt like, if people understood what was happening, they would get behind it.

And in fact, one of the most exciting things-- the New York Times actually did an article on their program at some point. And someone from the deep south ended up dropping \$100,000 on them as a result of that article. And that person continues to be a donor to them and deals with them and partners with them, and they talk about what's important. So communications is important. If people don't know what you do or why you're doing it or the impact of it, they have no reason to really think about you, unfortunately.

SALINA TEWOLDE: Thank you, Sharon. Do we have any other questions?

SHARON VARDATIRA: Just to be clear, the last webinar in this series is really focused on mapping out and getting a diversified revenue, diversified support. So that will delve more into some of the specifics that have to do with fund development strategies and things like that. So you heard about communications here, and I didn't go into a lot of that, because that will be a

part of a different webinar. But each webinar sort of focuses a little bit on different aspects of the sustainability planning processes and driving sustainability.

So we're not talking about communications. We are doing a community mobilization one-- I think number three. But so yeah, you heard about that here. You probably won't hear that much about it after this, except insofar as it may partner up with leveraging money and things like that.

SALINA TEWOLDE: OK, well, thank you, Sharon. I don't see any more questions. But I just want to thank everyone who submitted a question, and before you go, we would like your feedback on today's call. You can access a link to our feedback survey in the chat box. You'll also receive a follow-up email with a survey link and links to resources from today's call.

Here are some more ways to connect with us-- through our website, Twitter, @TeenHealthGov, and our periodic newsletters. Also, please check out our YouTube channel. Thank you for your time, and this concludes this webinar.

SHARON VARDATIRA: Thanks, everyone. This was fun.