

Rural Health Network Sustainability Assessment

Seven Characteristics of a Sustained Network

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Rural Health Network Sustainability Assessment: Performance Improvement Tool



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Introduction

The Rural Health Network Sustainability Assessment (Network Sustainability Assessment) is a validated assessment of five characteristics of sustained networks developed through a two-year study by Rural Health Innovations (RHI), the National Cooperative of Health Networks (NCHN) and Evalytics, LLC. The study was funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Federal Office of Rural Health Policy (FORHP).

The assessment defines conceptual characteristics or indicators that describe a sustained network. The assessment is a performance improvement tool, and a systematic method to increase the impact of rural health networks (RHI, September 2016, September 2017 and June 2018).

The definition of sustainability is the ability to achieve desired outcomes and maintain the ability to continue activities over time (Scheirer, 2005). The Rural Health Network Sustainability Assessment incorporates concepts from both the Baldrige Performance Excellence and Business Model Generation Canvas frameworks, providing concepts, structure and defined language.

Rural health networks are a critical solution to collaborating across non-integrated health care facilities and community agencies to achieve population health initiatives. These initiatives require networks to serve as leaders, facilitate continuous planning, convene and engage stakeholders, provide meaningful education, connect resources within communities and act on data for making decisions. Succeeding in these important roles requires thriving network organizations that are sustained over time (RHI, October 2017).

Network Characteristics of Sustainability

1. **Collaborative Leadership:** Promoting trust, transparency with information, creating opportunities for problem solving, and keeping abreast of the larger environment with the organizations' future in mind. It also includes a focus on members, partners, and stakeholders relative to the network's drive to meet its mission and attain its vision.
2. **Member-Driven Decisions:** Incorporating network members' needs into decisions for network products and services along with articulating network value as seen specifically through marketing efforts.
3. **Effective Communication:** Intentional communication with members, partners, and stakeholders. Communication is designed as a formal plan that is monitored and valued as part of a strategic planning cycle.
4. **Change-ready and Adaptable Workforce:** Proactive investment in network staff to support and develop a change-ready culture and workforce that is able to adapt to a changing health care environment.
5. **Continuous Improvement:** Consistent use of process improvement tools and techniques and systematize review of procedures to ensure effective process and valued network services.
6. **On-going Evaluation and Measurement:** Intentional evaluation of organizational efforts toward both goals and activities. Evaluation is designed as a formal plan that is monitored as part of a strategic planning cycle. There is a specific focus on involving organizational leadership and open communication of results.
7. **Sound Financial Infrastructure:** A focus on financial processes and procedures with the intention to purposefully address financial stability through savings and diverse revenue generation.

References

Rural Health Innovations. (2016, September), Rural Health Network Sustainability Assessment Study: Year 1 Findings and Report.

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Rural Health Innovations. (2018, June) Network Sustainability Assessment and Five Characteristics of a Sustained Network: Final Report of a Two-Year Study.

Scheirer, M. A. (2005). Is Sustainability Possible? A Review and Commentary on Empirical Studies of Program Sustainability. *American Journal of Evaluation*, Volume 26, Number 3, 320-349.

RURAL HEALTH NETWORK SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT: PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT TOOL

The purpose of this assessment is to provide a means to consider your network as a whole and identify opportunities for sustainability (OFS). Use this assessment tool to help identify specific areas to focus and invest in network activities that will increase the viability of the organization. Instructions and a complete listing of the 32 assessment questions within the seven characteristics of sustainability are included in this performance improvement tool.

7 CHARACTERISTICS OF A SUSTAINED NETWORK:

1. Collaborative Leadership
2. Member-Driven Decisions
3. Effective Communication
4. Change-ready and Adaptable Workforce
5. Continuous Improvement
6. On-going Evaluation and Measurement
7. Sound Financial Infrastructure

Instructions

1. When completing the online [Rural Health Network Sustainability Assessment](#), please respond from the perspective of your network organization.
2. For each statement, rate your level of agreement from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.
3. Upon completing your assessment, a summary and detail listing of results will be provided. You will also receive a unique link via email of your detailed results. These detailed results will be used for your Project Sustainability Action Planning.
4. Use your detailed results to identify opportunities for sustainability (OFS); those actions you rated as Slightly Disagree, or Strongly Disagree
5. In selecting your three OFS, engage your network board members in a conversation about the statements that are most critical to the sustainability of your HRSA Network Development project. Once selected, you are ready to begin writing your three OFS Action Plans.

Assessment questions for each of the seven sustainability characteristics:

Collaborative Leadership

Network leader is aware of regional and national health care trends that could impact network members.



Strongly
Agree

Agree

Slightly
Agree

Neutral

Slightly
Disagree

Disagree

Strongly
Disagree

Network leader creates opportunities for members to share ideas and problem solve together.



Strongly
Agree

Agree

Slightly
Agree

Neutral

Slightly
Disagree

Disagree

Strongly
Disagree

Network leader creates opportunity for innovation.



Strongly
Agree

Agree

Slightly
Agree

Neutral

Slightly
Disagree

Disagree

Strongly
Disagree

Network leader promotes transparency by disclosing information about network activities to their members.

<input type="radio"/>						
Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Network leader forms strategic partnerships that are aligned with its mission and vision.

<input type="radio"/>						
Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Network leader meets face to face with members to promote trust.

<input type="radio"/>						
Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Network has a formal strategic plan in place that is reviewed and updated annually.

<input type="radio"/>						
Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Network Board works with formal bylaws or membership agreement.

Strongly Agree Agree Slightly Agree Neutral Slightly Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Member-Driven Decisions

Network's marketing plan is consistent with its mission and vision.

Strongly Agree Agree Slightly Agree Neutral Slightly Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Networks' marketing plan was developed from an assessment of member needs for network services.

Strongly Agree Agree Slightly Agree Neutral Slightly Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Network continuously reviews its marketing plan to monitor progress toward marketing goals.

Strongly Agree Agree Slightly Agree Neutral Slightly Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Network has a written marketing plan that incorporates member needs into product and service development.

<input type="radio"/>						
Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Effective Communication

Network’s communication plan is consistent with its goals and objectives.

<input type="radio"/>						
Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Network’s communication plan informs others about its mission, activities, and key metrics.

<input type="radio"/>						
Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Network continuously monitors its communication plan to assess progress towards communication goals.

<input type="radio"/>						
Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Network's Board of Directors reviews communication plan annually.

<input type="radio"/>						
Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Change-Ready and Adaptable Workforce

Network measures staff satisfaction and acts upon the results.

<input type="radio"/>						
Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Network provides staff with learning opportunities to promote a change-ready and adaptable workforce.

<input type="radio"/>						
Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Network has a recruitment and retention plan in place that is reviewed annually.

<input type="radio"/>						
Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Continuous Improvement

Network routinely uses process improvement tools and techniques.

Strongly Agree Agree Slightly Agree Neutral Slightly Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Network systematically reviews procedures and processes to ensure appropriate infrastructure is in place and functioning effectively.

Strongly Agree Agree Slightly Agree Neutral Slightly Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

On-Going Evaluation and Measurement

Network's evaluation plan is consistent with network goals and objectives.

Strongly Agree Agree Slightly Agree Neutral Slightly Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Network's evaluation plan includes process measures to determine progress towards projects and activities.

Strongly Agree Agree Slightly Agree Neutral Slightly Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Network shares its evaluation and measurement results with members and stakeholders on a regular basis.

Strongly Agree Agree Slightly Agree Neutral Slightly Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Network leaders and Board of Directors are involved in development of evaluation measures.

Strongly Agree Agree Slightly Agree Neutral Slightly Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Network's evaluation plan monitors progress toward goals, objectives, and outcomes.

Strongly Agree Agree Slightly Agree Neutral Slightly Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Network's Board of Directors review evaluation plan and results quarterly.

Strongly Agree Agree Slightly Agree Neutral Slightly Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Sound Financial Infrastructure

Network has financial systems and practices in place.

Strongly Agree Agree Slightly Agree Neutral Slightly Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Network leadership reviews financial statements on a regular basis.

Strongly Agree Agree Slightly Agree Neutral Slightly Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Network maintains adequate cash resources for its operations.

Strongly Agree Agree Slightly Agree Neutral Slightly Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Network has on-staff or on-contract, a proven financial expert.

Strongly Agree Agree Slightly Agree Neutral Slightly Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Network has annual external audits or as required by law.

Strongly Agree Agree Slightly Agree Neutral Slightly Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree