

Opportunities for Sustainability Guide

Rural Network Allied Health Training Program

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background and Purpose2

Understanding Sustainability.....2

Components3

Glossary of Terms4

Organizational Profile6

Opportunities for Sustainability Action Planning Assessment7

Opportunities for Sustainability: Action Planning9

Opportunities for Sustainability Action Plans Summary 11

Reference List 13

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Rural Health Innovations (RHI), LLC is a subsidiary of the National Rural Health Resource Center (The Center), a non-profit organization. Together, RHI and The Center are leading national technical assistance and knowledge centers in rural health. In partnership with The Center, RHI enhances the health of rural communities by providing products and services with a focus on excellence and innovation. RHI is providing TA to the Allied Health Training Network grantees through a contract with the federal Office of Rural Health Policy.

The purpose of the *Opportunities for Sustainability Guide*, *Opportunities for Sustainability Action Plan Assessment* and the *Opportunities for Sustainability: A Template for Action Planning*, is to act as a tool for rural health networks to actively plan for sustainability as network leaders deploy their networks' business plan. The goal is to create specific action plans that will address identified opportunities for sustainability (OFS).

Sustainability can be addressed through careful consideration and assessment of an organization's efforts with specific guiding questions based on the Baldrige criteria including, "Is your organization doing as well as it could?", "How do you know?", and "What or how can your organization improve or change?" Patrice Spath, prescribes using a management framework, such as the Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework, for effectively diagnosing opportunities for sustainability.

UNDERSTANDING SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability of rural health networks is determined by how productive they are in achieving their goals and objectives, and how successfully they have positioned itself for the future. This *Opportunities for Sustainability Guide* is defined, for rural health networks and network projects, as the ability to achieve desired outcomes and financial viability through implementation and deployment of the network's business plan for sustainability.

The Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework was chosen as the multi-faceted systems approach application because it is the U.S. government's own quality improvement system. Baldrige criteria, developed for health care organizations in 2002, provides an analytical and diagnostic system for understanding the enablers that drive organizations to sustained performance excellence and achievement. The Baldrige criteria are widely accepted as the de facto standard for performance excellence. As Patrice Spath wrote in her book, [*Leading Your Healthcare Organizations to Excellence*](#), "Rather than an ill-defined fad whose use-by date has expired, the Baldrige criteria represent an interrelated collection of time-tested principles, procedures, and techniques that turn performance excellence from an abstract (and empty) notion into an operationally useful management model." Spath identifies that using a multi-faceted systems approach is critical and necessary for sustained performance.

COMPONENTS

The *Opportunities for Sustainability Guide* is designed to support rural health network leaders in both developing and writing action plans for network sustainability. There are four components within this toolkit for sustainably:

1. **Organizational Profile:** Understanding the systems of the network organization by summarizing the network's business plan components of strategy and leadership, marketing and communication, operations and infrastructure, and financial outlook.
2. **Opportunities for Sustainability Action Plan Assessment:** This Assessment is based on the Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework, to identify performance gaps that may be barriers for the network in sustaining its operations and reaching its vision. A multi-faceted approach for considering and assessing organizational components include leadership, strategic planning, customers and partners, evaluation, workforce and culture, and results.
3. **Opportunities for Sustainability: A Template for Action Planning:** Selected key barriers identified through assessment, as opportunities for sustainability are used to focus action planning. Action plans that address opportunities for sustainability support the network's ability to achieve desired outcomes and financial viability. The Action Plan identifies what initiatives are needed to address barrier(s), who will implement the actions, a timeline for implementation, and resources are needed. The primary function of the Action Plan is as an internal document for network leaders to focus initiatives and resources. Network staff will use the Action Plan to implement identified improvements. Board members will use the Action Plan to better understand the network's sustainability and provide support and input on development of network systems.
4. **Opportunities for Sustainability Action Plans Summary:** An Action Plan Summary is designed to assist networks in tracking forward progress by appropriately updating the "Status" column. This summary tool is helpful during a network's progression toward improving sustainability.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

The following are terms you will find throughout the sustainability materials. They are terms from the Baldrige criteria, as the following sustainability materials are built from the Baldrige Performance for Excellence Framework. Taking time to read through these terms creates a better frame of reference for your network's sustainability work.

([National Institute of Standards and Technology, Baldrige Performance Excellence](#))

Action plan: Specific actions that your organization takes to reach its short-term and longer-term strategic objectives.

Alignment: A state of consistency among plan, processes, information, resources decisions, workforce capability and capacity, actions, results, and analyses that support key organization-wide goals.

Approach: The methods your organization uses to carry out its processes.

Collaborators: Organizations or individuals who cooperate with your organization to support a particular activity or event or who cooperate intermittently when their short-term goals are aligned with, or are the same as yours.

Customer: An actual or potential user or your organization's services.

Customer engagement: Your network members' and other customers' investment in or commitment to your brand and service offerings.

Deployment: The extent to which your organization applies and approach in addressing the requirements of your organization.

Effective: How well a process or a measure addresses its intended purpose.

Goals: Future conditions/performance levels your organization intends/desires to attain.

Governance: The systems of management and controls exercised in the stewardship of your organization.

High performance: Ever-higher levels of overall organizational and individual performance, including quality, productivity, innovation rate, and cycle time.

How: The systems and processes that your organization uses to achieve its mission requirements.

Innovation: Making meaningful change to improve services, processes, or organizational effectiveness and create new value for stakeholders.

Integration: The harmonization of plans, processes, information, resources decisions, workforce capability and capacity, actions, results, and analyses to support key organization-wide goals.

Key: Major or most important; critical to achieving your intended outcome.

Learning: New knowledge or skills acquired through evaluation, study, experience, and innovation.

Measures and indicators: Numerical information that quantifies the input, output, and performance dimensions of processes, programs, projects, services and the overall organization (outcomes).

Mission: Your organization's overall function.

Partners: Key organizations or individuals who are working in concert with your organization to achieve a common goal or improve performance.

Performance: Outputs and their outcomes obtained from services, processes, members, and other customers that permit you to evaluate and compare your organization's results to performance projections, standards, past results, goals, and other organizations' results.

Process: Linked activities with the purpose of producing a service for a customer (user) within or outside your organization.

Results: Outputs and outcomes achieved by your organization.

Stakeholders: All groups that are or might be affected by your organization's actions and success.

Strategic objectives: The aims or responses that your organization articulates to address major changes or improvement, competitiveness or social issues, and service advantages.

Systematic: Well-ordered, repeatable, and exhibiting the use of data and information so that learning is possible.

Value: The perceived worth of a program, service, process, asset, or function relative to its cost and possible alternatives.

Vision: Your organization's desired future state.

Workforce: All people actively supervised by your organizations and involved in accomplishing your organization's work, including paid employees, consultants, interns, and volunteers.

ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

The organizational profile is a starting point for self-assessment as it helps the network leader carefully consider and understand the systems of the network organization by summarizing the network's business plan. The business plan is a compilation of plans the network has developed to achieve outcomes and obtain their vision. Components include strategy and leadership, marketing and communication, operations and infrastructure, and financial outlook.

A key to writing the organizational profile is to review each component and then summarize the key aspects that describe the organization or how it operates.

Organizational Profile Overview		
Vision: A vision statement articulates your network's aspirations. It outlines where your network wants to be or wants to achieve; communicating your network's purpose and values. It is future-oriented and part of the Strategic and Business Plans.		Mission: A mission statement articulates your network's purpose for being; communicating what the network does. It is present-oriented and describes how the network will achieve its vision in relation to customer needs. It is part of the Strategic and Business Plans.
Strategic Thinking		
Environmental Analysis: Part of the Strategic Plan.		Strategic Objectives: Goals that convert your mission statement into reality (located in the Strategic and Business Plans) and include a high-level statement of each. Titles should be descriptive and action-oriented. Example: Improve operating efficiency, provide outstanding customer service, and deliver timely and effective care. This is part of the Strategic, Evaluation, and Business Plans.
Blocks: The top six events and happenings going on in health care, your community, and your organization that are hindering the network from moving toward its vision.	Lever: The top six events and happenings going on in health care, your community, and your organization that are helping the network move toward its vision.	

Marketing Thinking	
Environment: Health care and other determinants influencing your network and members.	Members/Customers: Summary profile including the organization type and years as members.
Member Needs: Identifying those that drive service development. This is part of the Business Plan; Value Proposition Member Needs Assessment.	Competitors: Summary profile of competitors and their strengths to identify other avenues for members to meet their needs. This is part of the Business Plan.
Value Propositions: Articulate the value that the network provides to its current and potential members/customers, answering the question, "What benefit does this network service provide to our members or customers?" Articulate value propositions for each network product and service with a focus on specific members or customers. Keep this description at a summary level. This is part of the Business Plan; Value Proposition Business Product and Service.	
Promotion and Communication: The approach and methods of the network's value propositions; such as, message, audience and mode of communication.	Delivery: How are network services delivered to the customer, such as electronic, in person, virtual, training, etc. Keep this section at a summary level. This is part of the Business Plan; Desired Customer Experience and Relationship and Communication and Delivery.
Operations Review	
Leadership: Briefly describe the leadership skills and attributes that contribute to the success of the network. An organizational chart may be helpful. The key here is to show that you have the people resources in place to support network success. This is part of the Business Plan.	Key Initiatives: Describe key activities and initiatives focused on developing, implementing, supporting and providing products/services. This section is a high-level summary of your work plan or logic model. Initiatives are those activities that take place from 6-18 months out, and are aligned with your vision. This is part of the Business Plan.
Key Resources and Infrastructure: Describe the fundamental resources and infrastructure of the network that supports operations, (i.e. the 'guts or inner workings' that make it possible to create and deliver products/services). Provide just enough detail to show that the operations are effective, reliable, and stable. This is part of the business plan.	Key Partners: Identify key partners and how they are supporting the operations of the network. Key partners are those that are contributing to the success of the network's operations in meeting its mission. Key partners may also be members. This is part of the Business Plan.
Key Results: This is an executive level summary of the top 3-5 measurements that help tell the story of network progress and impact. Include comparative data or trend information as appropriate. This is part of the Business Plan.	
Financial Outlook	
3-Year Net Income Forecast: Show the net income forecast for your network. If appropriate, illustrate the net income forecast (pro forma) for network products or services, i.e. individual value propositions or scenarios. You may also include assumptions that develop different scenarios about your network's future. For example; Changing the number of members: Scenario 1 = No growth, Scenario 2 = Increasing members each year by a specific number or % increase, etc. This is part of the Business Plan.	

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABILITY ACTION PLANNING ASSESSMENT

The *Opportunities for Sustainability Action Plan Assessment* is a management tool based on the Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework to identify performance gaps that may be barriers for the network in sustaining its operations and reaching its vision. The overall purpose of the tool is to provide a means to consider your whole organization and identify *Opportunities for Sustainability* (OFS). It includes 22 questions within the Baldrige components of leadership, strategic planning, members and partners, measurement and feedback, operations and process, and workforce. These questions are organized within the Business Plan sections. Refer to *Opportunities for Sustainability: A Template for Action Planning*, pages 10-12.

After completing this assessment, identify questions that were rated at three or below, these are the *Opportunities for Sustainability* (OFS). Use the conversation below to prioritize the top three OFSs.

Selecting Three OFS for Action Planning Conversation:

- **Identify:** Identify questions that were rated 3 or lower. Read them aloud and/or post them to a flip chart for consideration.
- **Ask:** From the low-rated OFSs;
 - Which are you surprised that were rated at a 3 or below?
 - Which low rated questions ones make sense?
- **Ask:** In considering these low-rated OFSs;
 - Which ones have we already been working on?
 - Which ones do we think are not significant or we don't need to consider for our sustainability?
 - Which ones may be important to consider for our sustained work?
- **Ask:** In considering these low-rated OFSs;
 - Which ones, if we don't address them, may have long-term impact?
 - Are there any apparent common themes within these OFSs?
- **Select:** Select three OFSs to develop action plans, with the intention of improving the rating.
- **Ask:** Which are the three most important OFS's we should address?
 - *Participants identify their top 3 OFSs by putting a mark on the OFS.*

Once three OFSs have been selected, create individual action plans. A sample of an action plan can be found in the next section of this Guide.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABILITY: ACTION PLANNING

The *Opportunities for Sustainability: A Template for Action Planning* supports the network's efforts to achieve desired outcomes and financial viability. The action plans identify what initiatives are needed to address the selected OFSs from the *Opportunities for Sustainability Action Plan Assessment*, including, who will implement the actions, a timeline for implementation, resources are needed, and plans for monitoring and communicating progress.

The primary function of the action plan is as an internal document for network leaders to focus initiatives and resources. Network staff will use the action plans to implement identified improvements. Board members will use the action plans to better understand the network's opportunities for sustainability and provide support and input on development of network systems. Use the templates provided in the *Opportunities for Sustainability: A Template for Action Planning*, pages 14-19.

Opportunities for Sustainability Action Planning Instructions:

Create a separate action plan for each of the three selected OFSs that were identified as the lowest rated questions from the completed *Opportunities for Sustainability Action Plan Assessment*. See sample *OFS Action Plan* on pages 11-12 of this Guide.

OFS Action Plan I

Business Plan Category: Operations

Selected OFS: Network does not include non-traditional health care organizations as members, partners, or advisors.

Actions Items: (3-5 actions over 6-12 months) Actions that will begin to improve/change the rating of the selected OFS. Examples below.	Who will implement: Person(s) responsible for implementing the action? Examples below.	Start Date	Due Date
1. Expand the board to include two representatives from non-traditional health care organizations as advisors. Will require a change to bylaws.	Board chair and current network members	Beginning of 1 st Qt.	End of 4 th Qt.
2. Include two new partners or advisors from non-traditional health care organizations for next strategic plan event.	Network Director	10/1/17	2/25/18

OFS Action Plan I (continued)

Selected OFS: Network does not include non-traditional health care organizations as members, partners, or advisors.

Action Items:	Needed Resources: What are the resources needed to implement the actions and changes? (Time, talent, monetary resources, etc.)		
Expand board to include two representatives from non-traditional health care organizations as advisors. Will require a change to bylaws.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current board members/leaders will give time/energy in identifying potential new board reps. • Review and change of bylaws may require legal counsel. • Develop a marketing/recruitment plan for new board representatives may require outside contracted marketing support or board development expertise. 		
Include two new partners or advisors from non-traditional health care organizations for next strategic plan event.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a marketing/recruitment plan for new partners or new advisors. May require outside contracted marketing support. 		
Action Items:	Plan for Monitoring and Review: How will the actions be monitored or reviewed?	Information or Message: Who needs to know what during the process of change?	Measure or Evidence of Success: Identify how network will know action is complete?
Expand board to include two representatives from non-traditional health care organizations as advisors. Will require a change to bylaws.	Board discussion and review at monthly meetings to provide input and final decision through a vote.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board members and staff receive regular updates on progress. • Staff and partners informed of final board decision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bylaws are revised. • New board representatives attending board mtgs.
Include two new partners or advisors from non-traditional health care organizations for next strategic plan event.	Network leader seeks input from board members to identify potential new advisors, partners.	Board members, staff, and partners provided with final network leaders decision.	New partners or advisors attend strategic planning event.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABILITY ACTION PLANS SUMMARY

An *Action Plan Summary* is designed to assist networks in tracking forward progress by updating the Status column. This summary tool is helpful during a network's progression toward improving sustainability. Use the template provided in the *Opportunities for Sustainability: A Template for Action Planning*, page 13.

Opportunities for Sustainability Action Plans Summary Instructions:

When all three Opportunities for Sustainability Action Plans are complete, copy the three selected OFSs into the Opportunities for Sustainability Action Plan Summary (see sample below) and include accompanying action items, start dates and statuses.

OFS Action Plans Summary			
Selected OFS	Action Items	Start Date	Status
I. Network does not include non-traditional health care organizations as members, partners, or advisors.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Expand the board to include two representatives from non-traditional health care organizations as advisors. Will require a change to bylaws.2. Include two new partners or advisors from non-traditional health care organizations for next strategic plan event.	1 st Qt – 4 th Qt	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In progress• In progress

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