

Opportunities for Sustainability

A Guide for Action Planning

Rural Health Network Grantees

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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 the nation’s leading technical assistance (TA) 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 Workforce Training, Development, Planning, and HIT Workforce Network grantees through a contract with the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy.

UNDERSTANDING SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability of rural health networks is determined by how productive the organization is in achieving its objectives and goals and how successfully it has positioned itself for the future. For this rural health network *Opportunities for Sustainability Planning Action Guide*, sustainability of rural health networks and network projects is defined as the ability to achieve desired outcomes and financial viability through implementation and deployment of the organization’s business plan.

Using a multi-faceted approach is a key success factor for identifying and acting on opportunities 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 excellent

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.

PURPOSE, BACKGROUND AND COMPONENTS

The purpose of this *Opportunities for Sustainability Action Planning Guide* 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?", "What or how can your organization improve or change?" Patrice Spath, prescribes using a management framework, such as the Baldrige Framework, for effectively diagnosing opportunities for sustainability. This guide provides a management tool to assess components of a sustained organization and then identify actions to continue progress toward sustainability.

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

- **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.
- **Sustainability Action Plan Assessment:** Based on the Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework to identify performance gaps that are barriers for the network in sustaining its operations and reaching its vision. A multi-faceted approach for considering and assessing organization components include leadership, strategic planning, customers and partners, evaluation, workforce and culture, and results.

- **Opportunities for Sustainability Action Plans:** Selected key barriers identified through assessment as opportunities for sustainability are used to focus action plans. Action plans that address opportunities for sustainability support the network’s ability to achieve desired outcomes and financial viability. The action plans identify what initiatives are needed to address the barrier(s), who will implement the actions, a timeline for implementation, and what resources are needed. The primary function of the action plans 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 sustainability and provide support and input on development of network systems



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 off of 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 plans: Specific actions that your organization takes to reach its short-term and longer-term strategic objectives.

Alignment: A state of consistency among plans, 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 or performance levels that your organization intends or 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	
<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>
Strategic Thinking	
<p>Environmental Analysis: Part of the Strategic Plan</p>	
<p>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.</p>	<p>Levers: 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.</p>
<p>Strategic Objectives: Goals that convert your mission statement into reality (located in the Strategic Plan and Business Plan) and include a high-level statement of each. Titles should be descriptive and action-oriented, i.e., 3-5 words: verb + adjective + noun. Example: <i>Improve operating efficiency, provide outstanding customer service, and deliver timely and effective care.</i> This is part of the Strategic, Evaluation, and Business Plans.</p>	

Organizational Profile Overview

Marketing Thinking

Market Analysis:

Environment: Health care and other determinants that are influencing your network and members.

Members/Customers: Summary profile including the type of organization 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: Competitors and their strengths profile to identify other avenues for members to meet their needs.

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, remote, 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. On 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 summary or high-level description of your work plan or logic model. Initiatives are those activities that take place from 6-18 months that are aligned with your vision. This is part of the Business Plan.

Organizational Profile Overview

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 the products/services possible to create and deliver). Provide just enough detail to show that the operations are effective, reliable, and stable. This is part of the Business Plan.

Key Partners: Identify the 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 the 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. If appropriate 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.

SUSTAINABILITY ACTION PLANNING ASSESSMENT

Sustainability Action Plan Assessment is a management tool based on the Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework to identify performance gaps that are 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. Please refer to “Opportunities for Sustainability: A Template for Action Planning” pages 10-13.

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.

Conversation to select three OFSs for action planning:

- Identify the questions that were rated 3 or lower. Read them aloud and/or post them to a flip chart for consideration.
- Ask: Of all of the low-rated OFSs;
 - Which are you surprised that were rated at a 3 or below?
 - Which ones make sense having received a low rating?
- 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 common themes within these OFSs that are apparent to us?
- We are going to select three to develop action plans with the intention of improving our rating:
 - Which are the three most important OFS's we should address?
Have participants identify their top 3 OFSs by putting a mark on the OFS.

Once three OFSs have been selected complete individual action plans, found in the next section of this template.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABILITY ACTION PLANS

Opportunities for Sustainability Action Plans support 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 Sustainability Action Plan Assessment, including, who will implement the actions, a timeline for implementation, what resources are needed, and plans for monitoring and communicating progress. Use the template provided in the "Opportunities for Sustainability: A Template for Action Planning" pages 15-20.

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.

Action Plan Overview and Example

Create a separate action plan for each of the three selected OFSs that were identified as the lowest rated questions from the completed Sustainability Action Plan Assessment.

1. List the business plan category the question was included within.
2. Write out one of the three selected OFS questions.

Business Plan Category: Operations

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

Actions to change this OFS: <i>(3-5 actions over 6-12 months)</i> What are the actions that will begin to improve or change the rating of the selected OFS? I.e. what action needs to be taken to alleviate the gap? Examples listed below.	Who will implement: Who (person/network) will be responsible for implementing the action? Examples listed below.	Start Date and Anticipated Completion Date What is the timeline for putting these steps into place? Examples listed below.
1. <i>Expand the board to include two representatives from non-traditional health care organizations as advisors. Will require a change to bylaws.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Board chair and current network members</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>1st Qtr. begin effort</i> • <i>Complete by end of 3rd Quarter</i>
2. <i>Include two new partners or advisors from non-traditional health care organizations for next strategic plan event.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Network Leader</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>4th Quarter</i>
3. <i>Left blank intentionally for grantees to add more items</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Left blank intentionally for grantees to add more items</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Left blank intentionally for grantees to add more items</i>

Action Plan Overview and Example

Action Item #	Needed Resources: What are the resources needed to implement the actions and changes? (Time, talent, monetary resources, etc.) Examples listed below.		
1.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The current network board members and network leader will give time and energy into identifying potential board representatives.</i> • <i>Review and change of bylaws may require legal counsel.</i> • <i>Develop a marketing/recruitment plan for new board representatives may require outside contracted marketing support or board development expertise.</i> 		
2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Develop a marketing/recruitment plan for new partners or new advisors. May require outside contracted marketing support.</i> 		
3.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Left blank intentionally for grantees to add more items</i> 		
Action Item #	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 the network will know the action is complete?
1.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Board discussion and review at monthly meetings to provide input and final decision through a vote.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Board members and staff receive regular updates on progress.</i> • <i>Staff and partners informed of final board decision.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Bylaws are revised.</i> • <i>New board representatives attending board meetings.</i>
2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Network leader will seek input from board members to identify possible new advisors, partners.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Board members, staff, and partners provided with final network leaders decision.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>New partners or advisors attend strategic planning event.</i>
3.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Left blank intentionally for grantees to add more items</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Left blank intentionally for grantees to add more items</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Left blank intentionally for grantees to add more items</i>

Summary of Actions Plans

It is helpful for tracking progression toward improving sustainability. This tool is designed for helping a network track progress. Please use the template provided in the “Opportunities for Sustainability; A Template for Action Planning” page 14. Examples listed below.

ACTION SUMMARY PLAN			
Selected OFS	Key Actions for Change	When/Date	Status
1. <i>The network leadership does not include non-traditional health care organizations as members, partners, or advisors.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Expand the Board</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>1st Qt – 4th Qt</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>In progress</i>
2. <i>Network Board works with formal By Laws and Membership Agreements</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Develop By Laws and ratify.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>2nd Qt – develop</i> • <i>4th Qt – ratify</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Not started</i>
3. <i>Network utilized planned communication to share network activities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Develop Communications plan</i> • <i>Deploy communications plan</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>2nd Qt – develop</i> • <i>3rd – 4th -deploy</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Development in progress</i>

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