

# Rural Health Network Sustainability Assessment

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## Five Characteristics of a Sustained Network

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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, indicators that describe a sustained network. Use the assessment as a performance improvement tool, 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 Network Sustainability Assessment incorporates concepts from both the Baldrige Performance Excellence and the Business Model Generation Canvas frameworks, providing concepts, structure and defined language.

*Why does it matter if rural health networks are thriving and sustained over time?*

The answer is that 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 SUSTAINABILITY

- **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.
- **Member-Driven Decisions:** Incorporating network members' needs into decision for network products and services and articulating network values as seen specifically through marketing efforts.
- **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.
- **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 and valued as part of a strategic planning cycle. There is a specific focus on involving organizational leadership and open communication of results.
- **Sound Financial Infrastructure:** A focus on financial process and procedures. There is an 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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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.

# RHI NETWORK SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT

## Instructions

Use this validated assessment tool to help identify specific areas to focus network efforts; investing in activities that increase the viability of the network.

Created cooperatively with:



Within each of the five network characteristics there is a set of statements prompting assessment of network efforts that lead toward achieving desired outcomes and maintaining the ability to continue activities over time.

- Collaborative Leadership
  - Member-Driven Decisions
  - Effective Communication
  - On-going Evaluation and Measurement
  - Sound Financial Infrastructure
1. For each statement, rate your network's agreement with the statement as it pertains to your network organization; 4= Strongly Agree, 3= Agree, 2=Disagree and 1=Strongly Disagree
  2. Use the results to identify opportunities for sustainability; those actions that are rated as either a 1 or a 2.
  3. Create specific action plans for each identified opportunity that will move your network organization toward sustainability.

## Five key Network Characteristics

### Collaborative Leadership

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

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

Network leadership creates opportunity for innovation.

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

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

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

### Member-Driven Decisions

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

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

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

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

### Effective Communication

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

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

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

Network's Board of Directors reviews the communication plan annually.

## On-Going Evaluation and Measurement

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

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

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

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

Network has an evaluation plan to monitor progress toward goals, objectives and outcomes.

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

## Sound Financial Infrastructure

Network has financial systems and practices in place.

Network leadership reviews financial statements on a regular basis.

Network maintains adequate cash resources for its operations.

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

Network has external audits each year or as required by law.