

Reaching People with Disabilities through Healthy Communities

Phase Four – Implementation

Building Sustainability

[Karma Harris] NACDD really did a lot with regard to sustainability planning with our state and our community who are participating in this project. We encourage folks to think of the end in the beginning. Think of how the project would outlive the funding. And we allow them to complete a sustainability plan.

So each of our communities state project partners completed a sustainability plan, which included specific activities surrounding sustainable topics like funding, implementing policy, systems, and environmental change strategies and how you change your focus on those approaches, how to think about integration of these efforts among your community partner organizations, and how to continue to maintain, and even build, and diversify your community coalition.

So, these sustainability plans that everyone completed as a part of this process really kind of thought about the project as a whole, but also addresses each of these changes from the beginning by encouraging people to think about how to make it sustainable and think about the end and the beginning. And so, David, I feel like the examples that you gave really sort of correlate, and parlayed all of this together and it leads me to the next question for you, is a great segue into the sustainability planning piece of the conversation that happened during the implementation phase is, can you share any reflections of the sustainability planning process that you undertook as a State Expert Advisor?

[David Ellsworth] It is critical to plan on sustainability from the beginning of the project. I think that those sustainability plans that we filled out were very useful. They made us think about sustainability from the beginning. They kind of helped keep everyone accountable towards that goal. So, it wasn't easy to lose sight of. You could refer back to that tool. And at the end of the day, if the programmatic changes that we're making here aren't sustainable, we're really not doing our job. You know we're not very likely to achieve the maximum impact that we could have.

So that's why it's so critical to plan for sustainability at the very beginning of the project. I think one good example of this is the bike share program in Adams. It was really important to think, "Okay, at the end of this grant, what happens to those bikes? Who owns them? How are they maintained? Where are they housed? How can we continue to share them?" So, I think that was the sustainability plan that we created that led us down the right path, and we were able to create an MOU that outlined how that would be achieved after the funding period ended. For me, in general, as the State Expert Advisor, this kind of meant examining each opportunity that the local counties came up with to identify strategies for sustainability, whether those were opportunities to codify it in policy, or design an MOU, or some type of agreement where opportunities (exist) to try to secure additional funding.

I kind of felt that that was my role to help the local counties think in that manner as they were planning their programmatic changes. So, I think that that's my summary on the reflection of the sustainability for the project.

(Karma Harris) That's really helpful. Do you have any specific advice for communities who are working to implement and sustain their local level efforts? I know we've heard some advice on the state-side. But do you have any specific advice for local level?

[David Ellsworth] Yes. So, I think that it is really critical to engage the disability community and help efforts at the local level. If there's one thing the counties or local level health officials can do to make sure that their efforts are sustainable and meet the needs of people with disabilities, it's to engage that population and to include them meaningfully in coalition health work. And you can make that ask. You can say, you know, "Hey, we realize that people with disabilities are often left out. We don't want that to be the case. We really value your input. Would you be willing to serve on our coalition, or our committee?"

I think that it's important to realize when policies can be helpful. Policies often keep things going after funding opportunities end, whether that's, you know, a disability inclusion policy, such as in Marion, or a local level resolution to make sure that things are accessible, such as the trailhead that I discussed. I think that policy is a really good example of how to keep things moving and how to be sustainable without a whole lot of effort.

So, MOUs are very helpful. I'll say it again. I think that if you're a local-level entity looking to engage people with disabilities and might want a State Expert, or someone to serve in that role, look towards your UCEDD (the University's Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities). There are one of those resource centers in every state. They are a tremendous resource. And if you're looking to engage partners at the local level, just do a survey of the organizations that are in the communities. So, this might be a local board of developmental disabilities. This could be Goodwill, or Centers for Independent Living. And I think that engaging all those partners will aid in sustainability and support inclusion.