



Building a Sustainable School Health Program

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Introduction

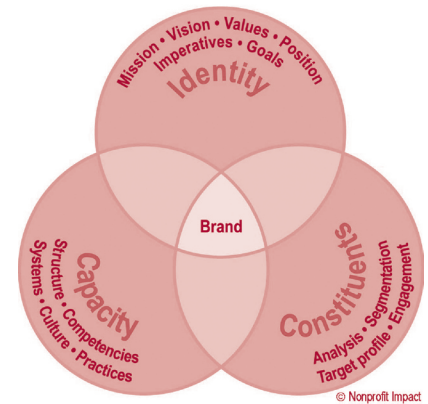
School health programs have attracted significant attention in the last decade. Millions of dollars of government and foundation funding have been distributed to decrease childhood obesity, promote physical activity and nutrition, and decrease tobacco use among our nation's children. To those involved in health education and in chronic disease prevention, school health programs are imperative. Common sense tells us that school health programs *should* be the first to be funded.

Despite the importance and success of school health programs, attaining funds on an ongoing basis at an appropriate level is, at best, competitive. Sustaining even the best programs requires constant attention.

This article provides a framework for program sustainability, called the *integrated strategy*. The framework developed over 30 years of working with more than 500 nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and mission-driven programs. More recently, the *integrated strategy* has been used with obesity prevention efforts, tobacco prevention programs, and public health agencies to ensure ongoing success and sustainability.

This article defines the critical components of program (or organizational) sustainability, discusses the application to school health programs, and shares lessons learned. The intent is to provide a more comprehensive definition of sustainability and to challenge school health coordinators to be more deliberate, strategic, and focused on building sustainable programs.

An Integrated Strategy for Success and Sustainability



Identity, constituency, and capacity are the key components to building a sustainable program. Full development and alignment of identity, constituency, and capacity builds brand equity.

Identity is a program's mission, vision, and values, and its methods and goals. Typically an organization's identity is defined by its strategic plan. A program's identity is defined by the business plan, or the program plan, with a focus on activities and tactics. Often a program's identity is defined by grant requirements or the policies of the institution in which it resides. In attempts to meet multiple grant or institution guidelines, a program's identity can become diluted and less clearly defined.

In today's competitive environment, identity must also include clarity about program position—the niche it occupies within a sphere of influence. This is a particularly important concept for school health programs. Redefining the sphere of influence—for example, from the school district to the community,—can be a powerful tool for sustainability.

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What is Program Sustainability?

Sustainability is NOT just finding the next grant to cover staff positions or program activities. Sustainability is:

Having the human, financial, technological, and organizational resources to provide services to meet needs and attain results towards mission on an *ongoing basis*. Sustainability requires the organizational / programmatic infrastructure to carry out core functions *independent of individuals or one-time opportunities*.

Sustainability requires program definition independent of a single grant source and independent of an individual. If the grant goes away or the individual leaves, the program continues. The *integrated strategy* provides insight as to how to create this independence.

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Constituents are the people who are integral to a program's success—participants, clients, donors, volunteers, stakeholders, or members. Even in the public sector, not everyone is, or should be, a constituent. Core constituents are those that are likely to take *significant action* on behalf of the program.

Being constituent-centered goes beyond outreach to constituents and getting them to do something the program needs. Being constituent-centered is a relationship-building approach that creates long-term, loyal, engaged participants, activists, members, donors, and/or volunteers. Building a constituency is critical to sustainability. For school health programs, the constituency may go beyond the students, teachers, administrators, and parents. The constituency might be the potential partners, donors and community influentials, and decision-makers. Being constituent-centered is understanding the needs, interests, perspectives, and language of your constituents and creating mutually beneficial relationships.

A clear identity and engaged constituency are needed to achieve capacity and vice-versa.

Capacity is having the resources (people and dollars) to do the job. It is also having the full infrastructure, including systems and policies, to support and sustain the program. Capacity is enhanced through effective, efficient, integrated operations to utilize *all* assets towards accomplishing goals and mission.

Brand equity (the value of a program's distinction) emerges as a result of solid identity, an engaged constituency, and supportive capacity. Brand is short-hand for program value, distinction, and strength.

- **Brand:** An organization's (or program's) essence. The distinguishing, enduring, and endearing characteristics. Brand is a program's distinct quality or experience that becomes universally anticipated by the constituents.

- **Capacity:** The human, technological, financial, and organizational resources—organized, managed, and deployed—to achieve results.

- **Constituents:** A constituent element is integral to the whole. A program's constituents—its members, donors, volunteers, clients, participants—are those people who are critical to success.

- **Identity:** The distinct and unequivocal definition and description of the program. Defined by why, what, and how it does what it does. Typically stated by the mission, vision, values, goals, and objectives.

- **Integrated Strategy:** Framework for developing and aligning identity, constituents, and capacity for organizational success and sustainability. Full development and alignment of components creates a solid and distinguishable brand.

- **Position:** The place or niche the program occupies within a sphere of influence. By definition, position is relative to the other programs that operate within that sphere.

- **Strategic:** Deliberate, calculated decisions and choices based on external, internal, and market context, and on current and projected conditions, trends, and forces.

- **Sustainability:** Having the capacity to provide services to meet needs and attain results towards mission on an ongoing basis. Sustainability requires the organizational/programmatic infrastructure to carry out core functions independent of individuals or one-time opportunities.

Applying the Integrated Strategy

Identity: Strategic Planning and Positioning

School health programs must define their identity within the parameters of the school district strategic plan, or within the parameters of grant guidelines. Program planning is a tool to define mission, vision, values, goals, and objectives within those parameters. A good plan provides a foundation for all decisions, provides unequivocal focus, and explicitly defines direction and outcome. What is your program's strategic focus—not all the things you do, but those few things that are imperative to success and sustainability?

Strategic planning is a tool to make deliberate decisions and choices given needs, data, community and population profiles, and relevant conditions, trends, and issues. A solid analysis provides context for decision-making. A true analysis (not just a list of strengths and weaknesses) will define the correct set of goals and strategies in the particular situation. For example, data collected for a community's obesity

prevention plan included demographic information, behavior risk factor data, community health statistics, and asset surveys. Using this data and information, decision-makers were able to create the program that best addressed the needs of their community.

School health planning processes tend to be inclusive. While it is valuable to obtain broad and diverse input, strategic decisions should be based on context and objective analysis and reflect deliberate and sometimes difficult choices. Only those with responsibility and authority for implementation should be involved in the final plan content. Further, mission, vision, and goals do not change with different opinions or players, unless conditions change or goals are achieved. Identity isn't "squishy." It is solid, unequivocal, and deliberate.

While planning is a first step in program development and management, sustainability includes decisions about a program's position in the community. Strategic positioning defines the program's distinct niche and its sphere of influence. This is particularly relevant to school health programs. Programs that define their position within the school district, by definition, are competing for funds with the football team buses as well as programs aimed at improving student academic achievement. That is an untenable (and perhaps un-winnable) position! What if the school health programs were positioned relative to the most important programs in the community—for example, the fire department or the police? Re-positioning is a tool to create new avenues of support, to have influence in a broader sector, and to create an identity that is more distinct and significant.

Like planning, positioning is a deliberate, analytical process that examines the program's assets and benefits relative to gaps, needs, or opportunities within the community. Positioning is also a process of defining and occupying a specific niche. Do school health programs have to occupy the school niche, or can they occupy a health care niche, a community service niche, or something else, depending on the community situation?

Positioning literally defines the tables at which the program leaders sit and to whom they talk. What position would best serve the program in reaching people of power, influence, or resources? Who in the community, other than educators and presumably parents, cares about healthy, safe, productive, learning-ready children?

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Constituents: Marketing and Constituent-Centered Programs

Marketing is a process of defining and analyzing the core constituents—those most likely to take positive action relative to the cause or program—and then defining strategies to reach and engage them. Strategies include the activities or services, how and where services are delivered, and the direct contact, advertising, public relations, and promotional tactics. A deep understanding of the core constituents is 80% of marketing. Once the constituents are clearly understood, the appropriate activities, outreach, and messaging become obvious.

School health coordinators are first and foremost marketers. You market to children and parents to influence behaviors or to school boards to obtain resources. Most school health coordinators would probably not define marketing as a primary function. Marketing has connotations of promoting to someone, rather than engaging in meaningful relationships of mutual trust and understanding. Without real engagement, the program may achieve a specific one-time behavior but not typically a sustained change or a loyal, engaged program constituency.

The *integrated strategy* challenges school health coordinators to redefine the constituents and their relationship with them. Constituents are not only the people a program serves or the grantors; they are the people who would *really* care if the program went away. This directly ties to identity. Without a clear identity, position, and resulting brand, potential constituents are not likely to know about the program, nonetheless care if it isn't there!

A constituent-centered program considers the constituent's perspective in everything it does and sees things through the eyes of that constituent. There is a perfect example relevant to school health programs. In conducting sustainability analyses for several physical activity and nutrition programs, key partners, including hospitals, businesses, and corporations, said it was most important to have solid data and evidence of impact. Of course, grant-driven programs have all kinds of data. However, a constituent-centered program would understand what data were most meaningful and how they had to be presented to resonate with that constituent. Health statistics mean little to business people. The data that have meaning are a decrease in workforce sick days or a decrease in absenteeism due to sick

children. Constituent-centered means understanding the constituent's needs, not just having the constituent understand yours! Always ask “what do they need from us?” rather than “what do we need from them?”

For school health programs and other community-based physical activity, nutrition, and tobacco programs, there is an emphasis on community coalitions or advisory groups. Simply forming a group, meeting, and getting input does not necessarily build a constituency, nor does it always engage the right constituents. Instead, deliberate and explicit strategic alliances could be used to develop an engaged constituency. School health coordinators seem to overlook a very valuable and distinct asset. You have something that other organizations, businesses, agencies, and programs want—access to children—whether it is to sign them

Always ask “what do they need from us?” rather than “what do we need from them?”

up for a parks and recreation activity, to educate them about the environment, or to get them to volunteer for a community-wide project. This asset is a competitive advantage for school health coordinators and should be used for the good of the program.

Being constituent-centered is a relationship-building approach. It is a willingness and ability to adapt programs and outreach strategies to better resonate with and engage constituents. Being constituent-centered builds an essential power base for sustainability.

Capacity: Organizational Development and Alignment

Organizational development addresses how individuals and groups work together to achieve results. It looks at internal systems, practices, structure, competencies, and culture to create operating efficiencies and effectiveness and to bring about growth or change. Creating capacity is fundamentally an organizational development task, but also requires alignment of activities and functions to leverage and optimize assets. Rather than managing to the funds available for each FTE (full time equivalent) position, alignment focuses on the functions needed to achieve goals, where the expertise for those functions reside, and how to integrate functions to achieve

multiple goals. In one public agency, for example, threats of decreased funding for physical activity, nutrition, tobacco, and pregnancy prevention programs resulted in a creative, more integrated (“break down the silos”) approach. Defining core functions and tasks and assigning people with the best skills for each of those tasks created significant operating efficiencies, eliminated duplication of efforts (from one silo'd program to another), and increased effectiveness, particularly in engaging the right constituents at the right levels.

Capacity is unarguably funding and staffing. But it is much more. It is also the systems, structures, and culture that attract, manage, and nurture those resources. A specific issue for school health programs is the lack of an infrastructure for a diverse funding base. Without the vehicle of a public schools foundation or a 501(c)(3) “friends” group, it is difficult or impossible to receive funds from sources other than grants. A nonprofit entity, or a strategic alliance with a community organization, is important for sustainability, fundraising, advocacy and constituency-building.

Another capacity issue is the school health program structure—reporting relationships and lines of communication within the bureaucracy. Structure needs to facilitate cooperation, sharing of information, and optimization of resources.

Delivering on the Promise of the Brand

When identity, constituents, and capacity are well defined and aligned, the program is better poised to deliver on its brand. Alternatively, programs whose strategic focus and position are unclear, who try to be all things to all people, or have systems and structures that do not support the accomplishment of strategic goals, cannot successfully communicate brand (no matter how prosaic a tag line or beautiful a logo!).

Creating, articulating, and delivering on brand is not a process separate from the fundamental work. Rather it is something that emerges as a result of consistently being focused and deliberate. At true strategic integration, the brand becomes the program's best compass point—does this action, this message, and this activity best deliver on the promise of the brand (i.e. healthy children)? Every strategic decision, operational activity, or external message can be measured by whether or not it stays true to, or enhances, the brand. This allows the program to operate from a position of competitive advantage, power, and potency.

Lessons Learned

There are some common themes that emerge in working to create sustainable physical activity and nutrition, obesity prevention, and tobacco prevention programs. Paying attention to these will take programs towards a more sustainable and potent future.

Think Strategically

Be clear about the desired impact and outcome—what should the activities and efforts add up to? Be deliberate and focused—expend resources on those activities and tasks that best achieve outcomes. Don't try to do all things for all people. Be steadfast—mission, vision, values, and goals don't change with every new idea or grant source.

Create Strategic Alliances

Create more deliberate, explicit strategic alliances. Of all the relationships and partners, there are likely three or four in the community that are imperative to the program's success. Create specific, explicit agreements in which each party adds specific value and contributes equally towards a mutually beneficial goal.

Develop a Diverse Funding Base

Create the structures, systems, or partnerships necessary for building a diverse funding base. If the program is truly important (it is!) and achieves results (it should!), then in even the smallest of communities there are people, organizations, businesses, and foundations that will support the work.

Provide Constituent-Centered Information

Define impact and outcomes in terms that are meaningful to the external constituent. Understand what is important to the constituent and create programs, services, benefits that resonate with the constituent's needs and interests. Engage constituents that are outside the traditional interests and players.

Operate from a Position of Strength

Apply the holistic, assets model used with individuals and families to the program! People support successful, strong programs, not needy and struggling ones.

Conclusion

School health programs are entering a new era. They have made a difference in the health and well-being of children and families. In some cases, they have been the catalyst for major policy initiatives. In others, they have begun to shift the culture of their community. They can no longer be solely dependent on grant funds, nor can they be "nice-to-have" but not imperative activities. The time is ripe for school health programs to be more fully developed, more potent and have a more prominent presence.

The *integrated strategy* perhaps introduces new and different language. Hopefully, this article has been thought-provoking and has provided a framework from which to think about creating ongoing success, presence and power. Sustainability is much more than where the next grant is coming from or how many FTEs will be supported. Program sustainability requires a solid, unequivocal identity, a supportive and engaged constituency, and fully developed and aligned capacity.

For worksheets to create your own sustainability plan, contact shelli@nonprofitimpact.com.

For more information on strategic planning, strategic positioning, marketing, constituent-centered programs, organizational development or fundraising, contact shelli@nonprofitimpact.com

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Sustainability Analysis Interview Question Template

By Nonprofit Impact

These types of questions are useful in conducting a sustainability analysis for your program.

1. Describe (name of program). What does it mean to you?
2. What has been the program's greatest benefit or contribution to the community?
3. What is different in the community now compared to before the program started?
4. If funding for the program went away tomorrow what would happen?
5. Who would care if the program went away—that is, who would take action if it did?
6. What is your vision of a sustainable program?
7. Where are the obstacles or resistance to our program sustainability?
8. What would it take in this community for a program to be truly sustainable?
9. Who else in this community is doing similar things and what is the potential or likelihood of fuller integration?
10. Who are the two or three most important players, decision-makers or influential organizations in this community, relative to this program?

Using Warm-ups, Energizers, and Closure Activities

Warm-Ups

Warm-ups and icebreakers provide training and meeting participants with opportunities to learn more about one another in a non-threatening manner. These activities generally solicit only surface information, i.e., work responsibilities, hobbies, general values, etc. These getting-acquainted activities are ideal for quickly mixing the group and lowering barriers.

If you are working with a group that has been together for some time, you might consider icebreakers that are aimed at establishing interactions of a more personal nature. These activities go beyond mere introductions, and are designed to explore thoughts, feelings and perceptions. Cautious selection is advised for use in groups that are not directed toward personal exploration.

Example Warm-up

Famous Person

- Participants write a famous name on a piece of paper and pin it on someone else's back.
- Participants try to guess what name is pinned on his/her back by asking others around the room yes or no questions.

Variation: Use a theme such as nutrients when studying nutrition, stress reduction techniques when studying stress management, etc.

Energizers

Energizers are activities a trainer or facilitator uses throughout a training or meeting to encourage participant involvement and interaction. Energizers shift the emotional nature of the group. They are most effective when the participants appear “flat”, overly anxious, or tired. Energizers not only serve to wake up the group, but can also help reduce tension.

One of the deadliest times in a training or meeting is immediately after lunch. The combination of full stomachs, midday fatigue, and lunch-topic diversions can potentially convert the sound of the speaker's voice to something akin to a lullaby. An energizer immediately after lunch is best when it includes physical movement to stimulate brain cells and alter the participant's waning physiological state. It is also recommended that the next break (followed by another energizer) take place no more than one hour after lunch.

Example Energizer

Group Doodle

Each person in a small group is provided with a sheet of paper and crayons or markers as doodling tools. On the signal, “Go,” doodling begins. After 30 seconds to a minute, the leader calls, “Stop.” Doodle pictures are then passed to the right, and everyone begins doodling on this next sheet until time is called again. The leader continues the paper shifting process until everyone eventually receives his or her original doodle paper. Doodlers may then take a minute to explain what they “see” in their drawings.

Group doodles can be based on learning themes and content—healthier eating, physical activity choices, or healthy ways to hang out with friends.

Closure

Closure activities are often neglected because we are running late or the participants appear tired. As a trainer or facilitator, the wrong way to close a session or meeting is to look at your watch, say “Oh, oh, time's up!” and bid the participants farewell.

Every closure activity should serve one of three purposes:

- tie things together—revisit content or process learning;
- form a basis for making action plans or moving forward;
- celebrate the end of the training event.

Additionally, providing appropriate closure may motivate participants to practice what they have learned when they return to their school or work place.

Think about this: if you have the same group of participants for three days, your closing times will increase each day. Why? There is more to revisit, there is more information to apply to the “real world”, and there is certainly more to celebrate!

Example Closure Activity

Closure Sentence Stems

Give each participant a copy of the following sentence stems, and ask that they complete them before they leave.

- As a result of today's meeting I'm feeling...
- Something I learned today that I'm going to use the next time I facilitate a meeting is...
- Something I'll commit to do before the next meeting is...
- I appreciate...
- I'm still uncomfortable with...

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Create Your Own Cubicle Gym!

By Taralyn Jensen-Jones
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No time for physical activity? Want a fun way to fit in fitness at work? Need a break from your computer? Then create a mini-gym right in the comfort of your cubicle or office and enjoy the benefits of a healthy mind and body!

Taking the stairs to another floor, parking farther away from the front door, or engaging in “walk and talk” meetings with your colleagues are simple ways to sneak in steps at work, but did you ever consider the idea that your workspace could become a Cubicle Gym?

Before you get started, there are a few things you may want to consider. First, write down your personal fitness goals. Do you want to improve overall health, increase muscle strength or endurance, or improve flexibility? Second, think about how much money you want to spend. As you will see below, you can create a Cubicle Gym for under \$100. Last, think about the size of your workspace. This information will help you design the most appropriate set-up for your needs and interests.

Now it's time to plan! Here are a few ideas for your Cubicle Gym:

- Create your own WOW (Working Out at Work) kit—the size of a gym bag—for under \$100! A few of the most popular low-cost fitness tools include resistance bands, exercise tubes, hand or ankle weights, jump ropes, yoga mats, and/or pedometers. Throw in your walking shoes, a water bottle, and some music, and you're ready for a quick cardio break!
- Get on the ball! Replace your office chair with an exercise ball. This is a simple way to work your core and posture muscles while you work. Then, when it's time for your 10-minute strength break, you can use the ball as a weight bench to work even more muscles at one time.
- Move more! Get a headset for your phone so you can move around while you talk.
- Plan ahead! Schedule your movement breaks by setting a friendly alarm that goes off at certain times of the day, maybe 10:15, 12:30, and 2:45. Or look for websites and software programs that will remind you to take breaks and show you how to perform different exercises safely and correctly. This comes in handy when it's time for that afternoon stretch break.

Be creative! Any movement is better than none. The important thing is to fit in 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days of the week, which can be achieved with just three 10-minute movement breaks at work. In terms of balance and variety, try to do at least one break each for cardio, strength, and stretching to cover all the components of fitness.

Remember, it doesn't take a lot of time to start reaping the benefits of regular physical activity such as increased energy, improved sleep, weight maintenance, stress management, and decreased risk of disease. Studies show that people who exercise are also more creative and productive at work. If you're ready to make a positive change in your healthy lifestyle without a huge investment of time, money or space, then consider creating your own Cubicle Gym and start fitting in fitness at work!



Colorado's *Roadmap* to *Healthy Schools*

Colorado is emerging as a leader in implementing coordinated school health (CSH) programs, while the number of building-level CSH teams increases every year. At the state level, our goal has been to develop a common framework and common reporting tools for these teams.

The *Roadmap to Healthy Schools* is a stellar example of what can happen when a true collaboration exists among agencies. RMC, the Colorado Department of Education (CDE), the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), and the Center for Research Strategies (CRS) combined their collective wisdom to create the *Roadmap* to meet an identified need in Colorado—a concise, step-by-step guide to implementing and tracking a successful coordinated school health program at the building level.

The *Roadmap* draws heavily on the experience of Colorado schools that are implementing CSH programs under conditions that range from excellent to challenging. It also reflects the experience from teams in other states and incorporates their learnings. We believe that the *Roadmap* will enable more schools to implement successful school health programs and, ultimately, have a positive impact on student health in Colorado.

In 2006, RMC, CDE, and CDPHE combined funding from a variety of sources and provided grants to 22 schools to pilot the *Roadmap*. As a result of this pilot program, the *Roadmap* was modified and is now available to any school in Colorado. In 2007, the combined pool of funding has doubled, and Kaiser Permanente has joined the collaborative. We anticipate funding up to 40 new CSH teams during the 2007-08 school year.

To download a copy of the *Roadmap to Healthy Schools*, go to:

<http://www.rmc.org/CSH/roadmap.html>



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Our Values:

- ^ Diversity
- ^ Research to test the validity of our knowledge
- ^ The importance of family in children's lives
- ^ The process of human development
- ^ The strength of community support