

PHASE VI Upkeep and Maintenance

Sustaining the Program

Upkeep and maintenance of a home is a work in progress. There is always something to update and improve. However, maintenance is critical to ensure an energy-efficient, durable, and long-lasting structure. Structures that are maintained in top condition sustain their value better than structures that are left to deteriorate.

Sustainability is arguably one of the most important aspects of program development. However, it is often a source of confusion, and is ignored, or postponed, until the end of funding draws closer. Similarly, many homeowners make the mistake of postponing needed upkeep and repairs to a home until small problems develop into major projects. Ideally, sustainability planning should begin from phase one and be revisited throughout each phase.

When a program considers its sustainability, the program should recognize that the single greatest selling factor of any program is how effectively and efficiently the program is running and serving their clientele. This type of evaluation was addressed in Phase V, but DJJDP – Center has found that continuous improvement is necessary to keep the program moving forward.

A Lesson Learned from the DisMISS Project Continuous Improvement Cycles

To ensure strategy effectiveness, participating schools have employed a process that encourages and assists them in achieving continuous improvement. Continuous improvement cycles are systematic, ongoing efforts to improve a school's overall performance.

Administrators involved all teachers and school staff to clearly define responsibilities and resources needed to ensure school improvement. This process is an ongoing cycle and changes as the needs of the school environment changes.

The core of the Continuous Improvement model is a four-stage cycle. The stages are:

- Building knowledge, understanding, and ownership of the school;
- Assessing current performance against predetermined quality requirements;
- Identifying and reviewing examples of good practice across the school; and
- Identifying and prioritizing improvements.

Continuous improvement is about working smarter to achieve success. Although schools indicated that the day-to-day activities were overwhelming, staff understood the importance of determining ways to improve practices, programs, and policies.

Sustainability planning is the identification of participants; those who are impacted, those who can influence, and those who can become advocates for the program. This group may differ somewhat from the work group identified in previous phases. Consider who the community advocates are and who can help recruit volunteers to become “champions” for the program. Community advocates usually are well respected community members that can enthusiastically support the alternative-to-suspension program. These individuals can assist in activities such as developing fundraising initiatives, influencing policy development, and creating public awareness campaigns.

Once the community advocates are identified, a common vision and understanding regarding what and how to sustain must be agreed upon. Next, a sustainability plan should be developed to promote community “buy-in.” The sustainability plan should address strategies and actions for partnership building, outreach and marketing, volunteer recruitment, and resource development.

Although creating an effective public awareness campaign takes time and commitment, it is critical to sustainability. Documenting success is especially important for alternative-to-suspension programs. This educates and engages the public, and builds community ownership. Information should be included regarding program achievement and outcomes. Alternative-to-suspension programs that demonstrate collaborative partnerships with other community agencies are more likely to be sustained than programs that are viewed as competitive.

The following tools are included to assist the sustainability phase:

Tool 1 - Guiding Questions for Sustainability Plan

- Questions for developing the sustainability plan

Tool 2 - Tips for Public Awareness Campaigns

- Ideas for public awareness campaigns

Tool 3 - Potential Barriers

- Possible barriers to consider in sustaining an alternative-to-suspension program

Tool 4 - Reasons to Support Alternative-To-Suspension Programs

- Statistics and general reasons why this issue should be addressed

Tool 5 - Tips for Holding Effective Meetings

- Suggestions for before, during, and after a meeting to ensure success

Tool 6 - Tips for Success with Media

- Suggestions for building positive interactions with media

Tool 7 - Strategies for Financial Sustainability

- Financial considerations for program continuation