



It's Never Too Soon to Think About Sustainability

Highlights from a U.S. Department of Education You for Youth (Y4Y) webinar

Because 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) programs aren't designed to operate indefinitely on federal funding, you need a plan to sustain your program after the funding cycle ends. In a webinar on Dec. 6, 2018, the Department's Y4Y technical assistance team and guests from the field discussed the characteristics of sustainable programs and shared tips and tools for developing a program continuation plan. This summary provides highlights from that webinar. The [archived webinar and related tools](#) are available on Y4Y website, a portal for online professional learning and technical assistance for 21st CCLC leaders and practitioners.

Presenters

- **Y4Y Technical Assistance Team Members:** Monique McDowell, Dave McConnell and Allyson Zalewski
- **Special Guests:** Emanuel Betz, 21st CCLC State Coordinator, Vermont
- **Focus on the Field:** Kathleen McKeever (Director) and Dierdre Mai (Administrator), Academic Support Programs, Elementary School District, Arizona

Highlights

Definition: Sustainability is the ability to build and maintain high-quality services and programs (even after your 21st CCLC grant has ended).

Sustainability tips for state coordinators: Mr. Betz shared the following tips:

- **Acknowledge and support the vital role of strong program leaders:** Strong leaders working in teams within strong local organizations are the backbone of a successful program. Help them see 21st CCLC grant funding as part of a “market basket of possibilities” for providing high-quality, long-term solutions that benefit students.
- **Support program success over time:** Establish accountability and support structures that help program leaders be intentional about sustainability from Day One. For example, establishing gradual funding decreases during the 21st CCLC grant period and helping local programs set achievable sustainability goals can foster confidence and success. Provide guidance on fundraising and other types of activities that are important to sustaining programs.
- **Focus on quality:** “If you don't have a high-quality program, there's nothing to sustain.” Be explicit about helping program leaders connect the dots between program quality and sustainability.

Sustainability strategies for program leaders: These strategies dovetail with ideas in the [Y4Y Implementation Strategies Checklist](#):

1. **Start early.** Check your grant proposal for a sustainability plan.
2. **Engage stakeholders.** Determine a yearly focus as you engage various groups.
3. **Make connections.** Create an [elevator pitch](#) to help new contacts quickly grasp what your program does and why it matters.
4. **Tell your story.** Stories and data can show you're meeting [SMART goals](#) — goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound. Family, community and others team members can help get the word out.
5. **Identify existing sources of support.** Consider state and local levels, including businesses, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, and school and district resources.

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Questions for program teams: Sustainability is about more than funding. Ingredients for long-term success include excitement, passion, accountability, and planning. Can your program team answer “yes” to the following questions? If not, what changes will you make?

- Are you maintaining student attendance and engagement?
- Is your program valued in the community?
- Do you know about a variety of funding sources and understand how they work?
- Are you building strong partnerships?
- Are you continually looking for ways to improve your program?

Ideas from Arizona:

- Having a dedicated, part-time **outreach specialist** can help programs get results.
- Monthly **professional development** can make a positive difference.
- Initial ideas and contributions from **community partners** will likely morph over time. That's OK. Stay focused but flexible.
- Programs are finding innovative ways to engage **stakeholders**. For example, several schools hosted CAFE (community and family engagement forums) where participants “dreamed big for students” as they dined on food prepared by high school culinary students.

Ideas from Vermont:

- Provide **youth leadership development** activities, and have students demonstrate or tell about the value of these activities. For example, a student-produced program newspaper featured interviews with community members. Adults in the community interacted with students and read the stories. Some programs have youth attend, participate in and/or report on school board meetings. These students get to see the decision-making process as they practice valuable listening and reporting skills.
- To **recruit and retain quality staff**, find ways to make the work enjoyable and rewarding. Match emerging leaders with mentors who encourage and support them.
- Use a **sustainability self-assessment** to pinpoint program strengths and weaknesses and take appropriate action. Vermont's self-assessment suggests strategies for improving program quality and explicitly supporting sustainability.

See Y4Y's [Creating Your Sustainability Plan](#) for specific guidance on these four steps:

1. **Sustainability goals:** Indicate program priority areas and establish sustainability goals.
2. **Financial plan:** Look at how resources can be allocated to sustain your program.
3. **Capacity building:** Determine how to leverage partnerships and other resources to support and sustain your program.
4. **Long-range strategic planning:** Create a plan for implementation and success that extends throughout and beyond your grant cycle.

