

## Planning for Sustainability

Creation of a sustainability plan outlines the steps to be taken to continue and expand programs through management and sufficient resources, both in-kind and financial. Planning for sustainability is an essential component of a project from the start. This is especially true with grant programs that have limited term, start-up funding. A plan for sustainability is often required for grant applications, and while funding is one component, there are other factors in sustainability besides money. This document is designed to provide you with a checklist of considerations as you plan for sustainability, and it provide examples of grantees who have had success in these areas.

### Checklist & Framework

#### Integration

- Internal support and structures

#### Systems Changes

- Addressing barriers, challenges, concerns for ongoing change

#### Support/Recognition

- Partnership

#### Champions

- Internal and External

#### Monetary and Non-Monetary Support

- Funding new or existing internal or partner resources

#### Replicability

- What and how to adapt for use in other communities

## Integration

As your agency is starting to plan a new project, or applying for a grant opportunity, be sure to give some thought about how this project fits within your agency.

- Does the project support your agency's mission and goals?
- Can activities for the project be integrated with the agency's ongoing operations?
- Do you have the facilities, technology, and resources to move forward?
- Do you have sufficient staff and skills to maintain the project and move it to the next step?
- Has there been discussions with staff (executive director, finance, administrative staff, and drivers) and advisory and governing boards about the opportunity?

As you begin your project or find a grant opportunity you want to pursue, it is important to get your leadership, staff, and governing and advisory boards involved from the beginning. You are not only engaging them in the decision making, increasing buy-in, and spreading the workload, but this step can keep a project moving forward should you experience staffing changes, absences, or turnover.

**Michigan Area Agency on Aging 1-B, recipient of the NADTC 2017 Innovations in Accessible Mobility grant reported that travel training has now been integrated into the [myride2](#) Mobility Management Service. It will continue to be a component of this service.**

[Southern Highlands Community Mental Health Center](#) (SH) is a community-based behavioral health center serving clients with developmental disabilities, substance use disorder, and mental health conditions, in rural southern West Virginia. In October 2020, the project lead for the FTA grant received by SH left the program. The

Transportation Coordinator took over as the day-to-day manager for the project. She had been working with the project lead and was fully informed on the project activities and goals. As result of having the Transportation Coordinator involved in the project, the departure of the project lead did not result in delays to project implementation, and the program has maintained the continuity of project activities. Additionally, the Administrator for SH, who initially submitted the project application, will be providing administrative oversight and actively monitoring the project.

You do not want to be in a position where the project manager leaves, and there is no one who is aware of the grant, or you do not have the support for the project from new management or the board.

## Systems Changes

Addressing project sustainability must have ongoing support from agency leadership, as well as support from community stakeholders. When considering a new project or applying for grant funds, barriers must be addressed, including efforts, achievable steps, and ways your agency and its riders can overcome these barriers for ongoing success and sustainability. Having both internal support and the support outside your agency can lead to long-lasting program success.

- Can activities for the project be integrated with the agency’s current operations?
- Have concerns or opposition to the project been addressed?
- Has there been discussions with key staff (Executive Director, Board members, finance, administrative staff, and drivers) or stakeholder advisory groups about the opportunity?
- Will affected users of the project have regular or ongoing opportunities for dialogue with your agency for service improvements?
- Have the project activities resulted in permanent change in accessible transportation for seniors and people with disabilities?

When developing or improving current services, an agency must identify the needs of the community and determine ways a desired service can fit into your agency’s operational capacity. [Southwest Transit](#), a 2019 Innovative Coordinated Access and Mobility (ICAM) grantee based in Minnesota, has developed an array of on-demand options to serve the needs of their community. Services include the *494 Corridor* accessing MSP Airport and the Mall of America commercial district. Same day services using *SW Prime* allows users to schedule through a mobile application, while offering targeted services like *Prime Grocery Getter* allows shoppers to travel to regional locations for essential nutritional items, and *Prime MD* provides rides for non-emergency medical appointments.

Creating targeted and specific services is a direct result of listening to the needs of the community. While also operating fixed-route and commuter services, transit systems must recognize that some clients cannot easily navigate the first- or last-mile on their own, and they often look to shared ride services, taxis or walking long distances to reach the grocery store or medial facility. Creating services like *Prime Grocery Getter* and *Prime MD* can significantly impact the daily well-being of Southwest Transit riders and the surrounding community.

When a transit system changes and develops new services to meet the needs of the clients, everyone wins. However, this effort takes the support of its internal leadership, who are willing to “go where the people are” and to listen and address the needs of its riders and the community.

## Support & Recognition

Sustainable projects must rely on support and recognition from agency leaders, as well as from community stakeholders. Recognition comes in many forms and often is most successful in marketing and advertisement. Support often relates back to a reliance on your community to be there at the project launch and continue to be the champion throughout its duration.

- How is the project recognized and valued by the agency's leadership and key decision makers?
- Has a *champion* emerged through the project activities, either internal or external partners, that is willing to support ongoing activities?
- How is the project recognized and valued by the aging and disability community? Transportation community? Community at large?
- Have key stakeholders been given an opportunity to provide input and feedback?
- Has development of new partnerships been built in as an ongoing activity?

During the coronavirus pandemic of 2020 and beyond, transit agencies have faced a tremendous burden of temporarily changing their service models and doing whatever is possible to support the communities they serve. [Molly's Angels](#), a 2020 NADTC Innovations in Accessible Mobility grantee based in Napa, California, did just that. At the onset of the pandemic, their service area was also faced with wildfires restricting access to large sections of their service area, affecting not only the staff at Molly's Angels but also destroying senior centers and meal sites, further isolating those in need of essential services.

*"Hello, Molly! Care Calls"* is a volunteer-based service enabling seniors to maintain a safe, healthy, and independent life without feeling alone. When community services were experiencing shutdowns, this weekly check-in service was able to connect with seniors and develop a sense of community. From these calls, Molly's Angels was able to determine who in the community needed essential items like food and prescriptions, and a volunteer would deliver items to the senior at no cost. Once community services were able to open again, Molly's Angels provides free rides to essential medical services, funded in-part by the grant from NADTC.

Molly's Angels supported their community when it was truly in need of support. Now that they have established a new way of operating, they are discovering ways to partner with other community services, like the regional transit authority, to provide paratransit rides for qualified individuals.

## Monetary and Non-Monetary Support

One of the key focus areas of sustainability is often funding. While funding is critical, sustainability can include a variety of monetary and non-monetary resources including new funding, changing the way existing funding is used, diversifying funding streams, absorption by another project, and in-kind support internally or from external partners.

- Can your agency's budget support the work that began under this project?
- Can another agency absorb the new project into their programming?
- What non-monetary resources can be obtained to move the work of the project forward?

(Marketing materials, space, staff time, bus stop locations, etc.)

- Do you need new funding to continue the project?
- Are there grants available from the Federal Transit Administration, community foundations, or other partners you can access?
- How can your agency diversify your revenue streams?
- Have you demonstrated value and demand for the new or expanded service?

When diversifying funding streams, it is important to recognize that your product may have value to others in the community, aside from the riders. Are you creating a service that a healthcare entity, employer, or other business may be interested in supporting through a contract?

Several NADTC grantees, including [Peace Village/Cancer Justice Institute](#) in Ohio, and [Thrive Allen County](#) in Kansas, anticipate continuing their programs with FTA Section 5310 funding which they had not previously received. More information about Section 5310 funding can be found [here](#).

[Senior Transportation Connection](#) in Cleveland, OH, a 2017 NADTC grantee, noted that their leadership better understands evening and weekend demand and pricing tolerances in their communities as a result of their project. They learned they must be able to clearly articulate their value, what the client is paying for, and why it is worth a premium.

## Replicability

Most grantors are funding projects they hope will be replicable in other areas. Is your program replicable? While this may not seem like a component of a sustainability plan, there are likely parts of your project that can be improved upon, different ways of doing things that may be more successful, and other considerations for communities to know should they want to replicate what you have done.

- Did the project accomplish what was expected?
- Has your agency been recognized as knowledgeable and having valuable expertise about accessible transportation for seniors and people with disabilities?
- Can other communities/organizations adapt your project or specific activities undertaken by your project?
- Were there lessons learned through the course of your project that should be shared to avoid problems for future replication? As you reflect on your project:
  - What was accomplished?
  - What did not go as planned?
  - What exceeded your expectations?

Be able to articulate these for your community and others who may choose to replicate your project. For many, it starts with a vision – a plan for making improvements in your community. How that vision becomes reality has many components and variables.

[Senior Transportation Connection](#) in Ohio expanded beyond the original partner community of North Olmsted to the entire county. By starting small, procedures were well-tested before expansion.

2017 NADTC grantee [Mountain Empire Older Citizens](#) in Virginia had a vision of the needs in the community and were able to use this project to help overcome an increasing need experienced by their clients. They were able to evaluate the needs of the community, tackle the problem, and they

were able to find a solution. “We are excited about the support we received, and we have made a difference in the lives of our clients.”

Transit agencies and human service organizations thrive on community support, and when your priorities can integrate with key stakeholders, the end user benefits. Successful projects must have top-down support, from decision makers who can influence policy or internal procedures to integrate real change for program delivery, but also from those in the community you serve. If your transit service is designed and tailored by customer feedback (both positive and negative), it is deemed replicable and easy to understand, and it has sufficient monetary support, most projects can have long-lasting sustainable outcomes. If the pandemic has taught us anything, we must support each other and work together, otherwise we will continue to work in siloes and create barriers in service delivery.



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