

Keynote Presentation by Lydia Marek, March 4th, 2014

Lydia: I can't tell you how blown away I am, but here in 2014 there is actually meetings solely focused on sustainability. When I started my research in 1996, we couldn't find anything much out there about sustaining community based programs and when we undertook a large study with my colleague (Inaudible) and I, we did a large study for the Department of Agriculture through their Youth at Risk programs, their Children, Youth and Families at Risk Project. Everyone said to us, why are you bothering doing this? It's all about funding and staffing, we were like, no, it's got to be little more nuanced than that and in fact all the research thus far has shown it to be, does that mean staffing and funding are not important? Well, no, of course not, but there are other ways and other things to think about as you are entering into sustaining your program. So, today I was asked to mostly focus on kind of the bigger picture. I'm not going to give you my factors of sustainability, those of you that have heard me before, I'm going to just simply kind of state it. If people have any questions or want any more information on a research base, if you are a research geek like I am, we published a paper in 2004 and developed an assessment to do with a lot of that as well.

So, there's lots of ways to think about sustainability, I think the most critical piece is to think about sustainability. So, oh, that's the disclaimer. So sustainability, what is it, what makes it happen, what takes away from it and how do you know you have sustained your program? ... and the reason I put that is that, are you sustaining a program, are you sustaining a project, are you sustaining a collaboration, what is it that you are sustaining? And for most of you in this room it will be somewhat similar although it looks like from your descriptions there are a little bit of differences in who you are targeting and how you approach it. So why sustain? I was asked to talk about why sustain and you know I was thinking about it and I thought, okay, I'm going to get all kinds of great information about why you should sustain, but it really comes down to, you just have an obligation to do that. If we are going to start something particularly in the more depressed with vulnerable populations, we owe it to them and I have this quote that I just have loved and those of you that have seen me do presentations before, I use it every time because I just think it's fantastic and it was by a program professional. We have a responsibility to our program recipients. They've had so many losses in their lives and for us to come in for a year or two or three, give them hope, have the program activities/project put in whatever word you want there, we've just caused another loss and a further loss of hope in their lives and I think this states it beautifully, we have obligation.

So, planning, planning, planning. The fact that you are doing this at the beginning of this granting sequence is fantastic because that's one of the things we found, the earlier you plan the better chance you have of sustaining. So, you need a plan which you are going to have, at least a good start to when it sounds like by the time you go home and you need the right partners and involvement and there are some worksheets that it sounds like you have that's going to help you brainstorm and get there and I encourage you all is they have so far to share with each other because sometimes we have program or community champions that we would have never thought about but someone found somebody in a bank or somebody found somebody in a restaurant or wherever it might be. Sustainability plans, I'm reiterating, are living documents, they must be intentionally reviewed, they don't go on a shelf, they're roadmaps that are being intentional and again it's an entry level. I would ask all of you to consider looking at them

quarterly, I would even ask you to think about looking at them monthly when you meet with the variety of stakeholders, how are we doing, are we getting to where we said we were going to be getting to by now, should always have a timeline attached to the activities you are going to be doing for your plan, it's a process, monitor and adapt. Someone, one of your factors was adaptation and I agree with that.

So, how do we define sustainability? You have a sustainability definition that OAH gave you. When we started our project in 1996, people were saying, so how do you define sustainability and we were like, I have no idea, really I had no idea or how to define sustainability at that point. So, after 10 years of research and many, many, many interviews, after five years we were ready to make our statement and that's what I'm going to go to in a moment. I think it's important to recognize though it's not just sustained, or not sustained, that's easy to say with the program, right, because you see it or you don't see it, but there are levels of sustainability as well. Okay, so, conceptualizing it is complex and luckily for you a lot of that work has already been done and now you just need to kind of take that and think about how you can adapt it to make it work for you in your community with your project. So, these are the things we paid attention to when we were going to define whether a project is sustained or not. With a level of program activity, how much of the current program goals are consistent with the original program goals and we'll get into that in a moment and the degree to which the program benefits are available to the communities. So, again it is not yes, no, there are levels. So, here is our definition and I'm still really happy with it a decade later. A sustained project is one whose programs and services are maintained continuously over time, they keep a focus consistent with the original goals and objectives that include the original, not the original people but the targeted groups, the individuals, the families and the communities it was originally intended to serve. We went on to say, it's the power or the capacity to continuously respond to identify community issues and that's wrapped up in several of the factors that were presented to you today, adaptability, community, responsiveness. So, how does the definition work, I'd say there are several degrees of freedom, there are lots of nuances to it, but the intensity and level that the programs and services are offered, the flexibility a program has and how institutionalized does that program become? As you think about sustaining your project and what it's going to look like in three years, you probably have some idea, are we going to be an independent, you know, organization, are we going to attach ourselves to other organizations in our community, or is someone else going to totally take it over and be able to stay constant with the original goals and services. Programs change, some get bigger, some get smaller, that doesn't necessarily tell us anything about the sustainability. Example, there was a community that had an after-school program, they had it in four different schools, funding was coming to an end, they were planning for their sustainability and they decided they could better serve in terms of the money they had, they can do the same level of programming, they went into one site and then they provided transportation back and forth to the others. Now, will that work in a really rural community where everything is so spread out? No, then you are going to look at a different population, but for them if you looked at it, you would have thought, oh, they are barely sustained at all, it's only at one place. I count that as sustained, they were serving the same kinds of people that they originally started to, they were doing the same kinds of activities, projects, whatever words you want to say for services and they were targeting the same kids for the same outcomes, same goals. And here's other ways and again I've put a lot of this in the slides, so you have the information but these are ways of thinking about sustainability, aligned to become part of another organization, others are

totally independent. Some people change the actual services or activities they deliver because they get a different funding source, well, how far away is that from the original goals and services? If now you are focused on substance abuse and before you were focused on teen pregnancy or teen pregnancy support assistance, not so much the same.

So, here are questions that I encourage you all to think about as you work through your sustainability. Is the project meeting its original goals, is it maintaining, expanding, reducing or changing its efforts to meet its goals which is not a bad thing, that frequently happens, but keep in mind what the original goals of the projects were. Is there secure future funding and how do the changes that you may have to enact to sustain your project impact the original goals that you had? So, here are some very common changing patterns. Lot of times I would see rather than paid staff, they would go to volunteer staff. That can work, it doesn't always work as effectively, what kind of training do these volunteers have, what kind of background do they have? Sometimes it works. So, how much of the above can be done and still be sustained? So there are lots of different frameworks of sustainability and you have the one that you will be working with that OAH developed based on lots of different input and many of it overlaps with mine, leadership competence, effective collaboration, understanding the community, program responsibility, strategic funding, staff involvement and integration and demonstrating program results. The fact that you are already talking about evaluation, getting financial support to do evaluation and having a more national approach to evaluation is fabulous, this didn't always, this wasn't always the case. Very hard to sustain your project when you can't demonstrate it's effectiveness, right, I mean that just makes sense.

So, which factors are the most important and I was hesitant with this one because the way we conceptualize our framework with it, everything is interactive, it goes back and forth bidirectional, where do you enter the framework. I think depending on your community you enter where it makes the most sense. As you work through the sustainability process that they have set up for you, you will assess and you will probably look at your weaknesses and your strengths. I would use my strength to address my weaknesses if my collaborations were fabulous and my evaluation was not so good, I would look to my collaboration to help me address my weaknesses, it's all matter of strengths based. So, that's why I think doing an assessment is fantastic, do it now at the beginning, continue to look at it, see where your strides are being made, you will never be perfect across all the areas that's too much to even hope for, but to see momentum going in the right direction and to strengthen everything you can to sustain the project. However, the research does point in terms (inaudible) short term, you can have your project survive short term and I want to underline short term. Without strong collaboration, you can come into a community and start a program after you have enough money and it will look like it's going on short term, you can go ahead and do your evaluation short term without the other factors and without being responsive to community changes, short term, because eventually they are going to like, you know, go throw the party and nobody will come, so to speak, right, if you are not doing what the community needs, but you are less likely to be successful even in the short term if you have poor leadership, if you don't have enough money and if you have poorly involved trained staff, you are not even going to be able to manage short term.

Obstacles to set sustainability are kind of the reverse of the facilitators of sustainability as one would expect. A few other things that I think are important to talk about: Staff turnover came up

as a huge obstacle for the projects that did not sustain, huge. (Inaudible)Community politics, sometimes we just cannot gauge and you are working with, you know, a population, there is a lot of different feelings about teen pregnancies, so there is a lot of politics that surround that, sometimes in your favor and sometimes not in your favor, got to be aware of it as I am sure you all are. Local economy, you can't control that, conflict, but I see often times happens is you all have different agencies working together because it's collaboration we know is critical to sustain your project and to really make sure your project reaches who it needs to reach, but a lot of times there are turf issues. People don't want to give up their stuff. And I, you know, I could do like a three-day thing on collaboration, it's important to be mindful, mindful of it and hopefully conversations can occur around it. User fees I will bring up, because user fees frequently happen after grant funding ends. Alright we can still do this project, but now we are going to charge people to come to it and I will give you an example of that when we go through that. And when I say project ownership issues it comes back to the conflict piece too, you know, you may have three organizations working with you, one of them really wants to have it aligned with them, you have, you know, what I'm talking about, all that stuff that goes on in communities and dealing with people and organizations and agencies and turf and whatnot. So, the two major obstacles as people told me at the beginning was all about funding and staffing, these were the two major obstacles that keep coming up over and over again in my own research and in others' research. So, any questions, because what I'm going to turn to now is give some examples and let's talk about what sustained is or isn't or might be, any questions or comments as I run through this? Okay then.

So, I'm going to give you some examples and we are going to discuss, is it sustained? Now you all come with your own definition of sustainability, right, so I would encourage you pull it out, pull out your definition of sustainability as it relates to your community and your projects. So, here's an after-school program that was for at-risk youth, I didn't turn the, I didn't make the term at-risk youth there was a variety of criteria that they use to do this. So, this program provided homework assistance, healthy snacks, life skill education, physical activity, all that good stuff that we want to see our kids doing. Well, after the grant funding ended it continued to do all those same activities, so if you went to that school program you would see kids having homework assistance, having healthy snacks, getting all kinds of good life skills, education and physical activity. However, now the program was no longer free, they were charging user fees, sliding scale but user fees. Do you think that changed the demographic makeup of the participants, right? I mean, I had an hour and a half conversation with them and it didn't come up until, you know, I was asking about changes and this and that, nothing came up about user fees until I said, well, how are you doing this, you know, are you charging user fees and they are like, oh yeah. Now your demographics have changed completely, is the program sustained? Lot of people saying no, anyone want to disagree, devil's advocate? Yeah, I don't see it sustained at all, looked like it, so you can't always trust your eyes even when you go and you want to do some, you know, site visits to see what's going on because it was no longer consistent with the original goals of serving at-risk youth. Example number 2, the goals of this project were to improve standardized scores, improve grades and behavior at school, improve science and language literacy, improve self-confident, this was like the world peace school, they had everything but the kitchen sink in the school. Two years later the goals were the same, they increased their service area from four schools to 15. The number of participants and the number of staff members doubled, this is two years after funding ends and they spent much less time at

each of the schools because now they had 15 and even though they doubled their staff and they quadrupled their schools, is it sustained, what do you think, make me a case. You are messing around with dosage, how do we know that one hour a week versus 10 hours and I don't know offhand, but it reduced significantly. That project I would imagine did not use program evaluation that we knew what was the cutoff, at what level did we stop seeing effective change. So, if we don't know that and we see the time reduces by a whole lot, is it sustained, is it not sustained? An evaluation will help you know that, are you still effectively reaching those goals? Counterargument, come on, you all stretched.

Alright, example number 3, provide a safe place for children after school preventing pregnancy, develop program and curricular to provide positive alternatives for (inaudible), increase the student sense of personal powers of efficacy, responsible decision making, communicate, you know, all of the things that we know we want to build up in our kids, develop pre-employment skills, expand career options and enhance parenting skills for participating parents or expectant parents. This targeted girls and boys in the sixth to the eighth grades that were identified by three middle schools as at-risk, at least three quarters came from low to moderate income homes, twice a week the girls went to the YWCA, twice a week the boys went to the Boys & Girls Club of America, they provided homework, field trips, open rec, curriculum all kinds of things. One year after the grant funding ended the number of participants decreased, they no longer had a yearlong program. They took out their summer program. To satisfy the funding requirements of their new funder they had to, they got their funding from a local housing authority and some neighborhood groups, so most of the participants came from a certain neighborhood and a certain apartment complex, housing unit. They reduced their programs down to one hour a day for five days a week, so instead of like two days where it was longer they just went to an hour each day, they no longer have the Boys & Girls Club and the YMCA together, you know, they would be kind of coordinating activities because they were talking to girls and boys separately but focusing on the same kinds of things. YWCA still serving 40 girls, we never could get the Boys & Girls Club to talk with us and they couldn't provide transportation to children from the school to the YWCA or the EGBA and then took them home. Lots of changes, you go to that YWCA and you would see sixth to eighth grade girls, you go to the Boys & Girls Club and you'd see sixth to eighth grade boys, what do you think? It's (inaudible), isn't it, it's not so like, you know, oh we are sustained or we are not sustained, that's something really important to keep in mind. I was working on a project, it was a National Science Foundation grant and they were trying to increase young girls' interest in science technology, engineering and math. So, they went into five states, poor, poor Appalachia, I live in southwest Virginia, so it's Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee. And at the beginning of the project, we had a six-month planning period, I kept saying to the project investigators what is it that you are trying to do that you want to see sustained in five years at the end of the grant? And they said, well, you know, I'd like it to be where we walk down the street and I hear that people are talking about our project; then I will know it's sustained because we got that information out. That's kind of a hard thing to measure, don't you think, you know what, (inaudible) it be, like me hanging out in Tennessee and walking in the streets, you know, excuse me, have you heard about such and such project? Well, the project ended as much as sustainability was pushed and I can push, as much as I continued pushing it please define it, please know how are you going to know you've done it, if you don't know what the end point is. I don't even care how they would have defined it if it was measurable, if it made sense.

So, as you think about your own definition of sustainability I would encourage you to think about all those other stakeholders you work with and make sure you are on the same page of what it means and how will you know, how will you know, have you sustained. Is it better to offer less programming to more people so that at least you are reaching more individuals or is it better to keep your participant levels lower but do more intensive work and you know your population and what you are trying to achieve? These are questions to consider.

I think I have one or two more examples. This was a reading literacy program, the idea was to reduce school dropout rates and these are always so hard because usually they start in elementary school and we don't get the money to do longitudinal research, so we do cross-sectional research and we try to make some kind of connection between it. Okay, this was a rural area, transportation was needed to get those fourth and sixth graders to the after-school program. They provided the program two days a week during the school year, they did field trips in weekends, school holidays, trying to get literacy efforts enhanced. They had summer programs that ran three days for eight weeks, they had a parent education newsletter that went out every month. One year after the grant funding ended the funding for the activities were taken over by a totally different project and they were implementing the program through the schools and other community agencies, they planned that from the beginning, who is going to take this over when the grant dollars are done and we no longer have a paid coordinator or paid program director to do it. They expanded their programming from two to three sites, they increased their budget and the number of participants and collaborators and the former program director is now a director of the project that took it over, sustained or not. Nice right, really nice, I mean wouldn't you all love to come back here in three years and say, well, we planned at the very beginning that this school that we are dealing with, it was going to take it over, but we needed to get things in place and have a transition happen slowly and now I am working for the project and the school is now my employer, can be kind of cool, I would assume the goals would be the same and you are going to have somebody that really knows what's going on.

Example number 5, enhance academic performance for at-risk youth for providing before and after school programs, provide family enrichment opportunities, provide lots of things and we are also going to have monthly family fun nights and they required them to go to those monthly fun nights which I always thought was kind of funny like, they are required to go have fun. A year after the funding ended, there was a coalition, a collaborative that did these things together and they still did it, there was no longer a paid coordinator that was done to the grant, but that coalition was so committed to it, they were going to do it themselves, they do the same activities, they can't do the summer program, they also found that they didn't do the morning, that you had a morning breakfast program for these at-risk kids, but they are not doing that anymore, you know why, because the school started doing it. So, they did it until the needs of the community changed. Does that mean they failed because they are no longer doing it? Of course not. On paper, it may look if we didn't give the reason why they stopped you may think, that's terrible, I mean these kids have to have their breakfast to start, well they still are. And the coalition needs to provide program direction and search for funding. So, that coalition is active and they are doing what they can and I would bet that they are doing it on their own time in their own dollar. They also expanded their definition of at-risk to include latchkey kids, and I'm putting all this there just so you have an idea of some strategies people have used, they cut back their staff and

increase their reliance in volunteers. If you do that you must have a training plan in place. So, now they have their funding mostly through two local school districts and sliding scale user fees, however, the sliding scale user fees have not changed the demographics, because they are still able to provide it for free and those that can pay a little, pay a little and those that can pay more, pay more, okay.

So, when you think about your own projects, here you are at the beginning of your three year project, right, and how many of you had another project before this one focusing? Well, you look familiar too, you were in Oregon right, okay. So, as you think about your project and you are developing your sustainability plans, what do you think you want it to look like. You are talking about providing assistance to young women in intimate, violent situations, right. Some of you are talking about providing support, social support, medical support, whatever that support is to the expecting couple, some of you have focused on the women, some of you have focused on both, some of you have a particular emphasis on male part, some of you are doing all of it. What is it going to look like, what are you hoping, what are your dreams? I mean when you were defining sustainability you were thinking about your own projects, correct? So, there had to be some hope about what you would like to see happen in three years when your federal dollars end.