

# Sustaining Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs

The Office of Adolescent Health (OAH) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services supported a study to understand how programs are sustained after federal funding ends. This brief is the second in a series about the sustainability of OAH grantees and discusses key lessons learned from programs operated by the Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) program whose grant period ended.

Former TPP grantees highlighted five lessons related to program sustainability: (1) identify or develop a program that is responsive to the needs of the community, (2) plan ahead for implementation both during and after the grant period, (3) mobilize champions for the program in the community, (4) integrate the program into local institutions, and (5) build the capacity of implementation partners early in the grant period. The purpose of this brief is to share these lessons with current and future grantees so they can use them to build sustainable programs.



## Lessons Learned from Former OAH Grantees



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## Introduction

Program practitioners and funders share a common goal to develop programs that are sustainable beyond a particular funding period. Both parties must devote considerable time and effort to plan how to continue delivering services after the grant ends. Planning ahead for sustainability is critical for ensuring the long-term success of a program. The Office of Adolescent Health (OAH) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is committed to supporting the success of the programs it funds by working with former grantees to understand and share best practices for sustainability (OAH's efforts to support program sustainability, p. 6).

This brief is the second in a series about the sustainability of former OAH grantees. The first described the experiences of former Pregnancy Assistance Fund (PAF) grantees funded from 2010 to 2013 (Asheer et al. 2017; <https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/sites/default/files/paf-brief-sustainability-study.pdf>). This brief offers lessons based on the experiences of former Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) grantees funded from 2010 to 2015. TPP grantees were funded at one of two tiers: Tier 1 grantees replicated evidence-based programs and Tier 2 grantees implemented new or innovative programs. Of the 94 grantees that received TPP funding in 2010, 64 were not awarded funding in the competitive cycle for 2015. Findings in this brief are based on interviews and a review of administrative documents from 27 Tier 1 grantees and 10 Tier 2 grantees that agreed to participate in OAH's sustainability study (Figure 1).

Of the former grantees in the study, 70 percent of Tier 1 grantees and 90 percent of Tier 2 grantees sustained all or part of their TPP programs after the federal grant period ended (Figure 2). Most of the former grantees that sustained continued to operate the program themselves

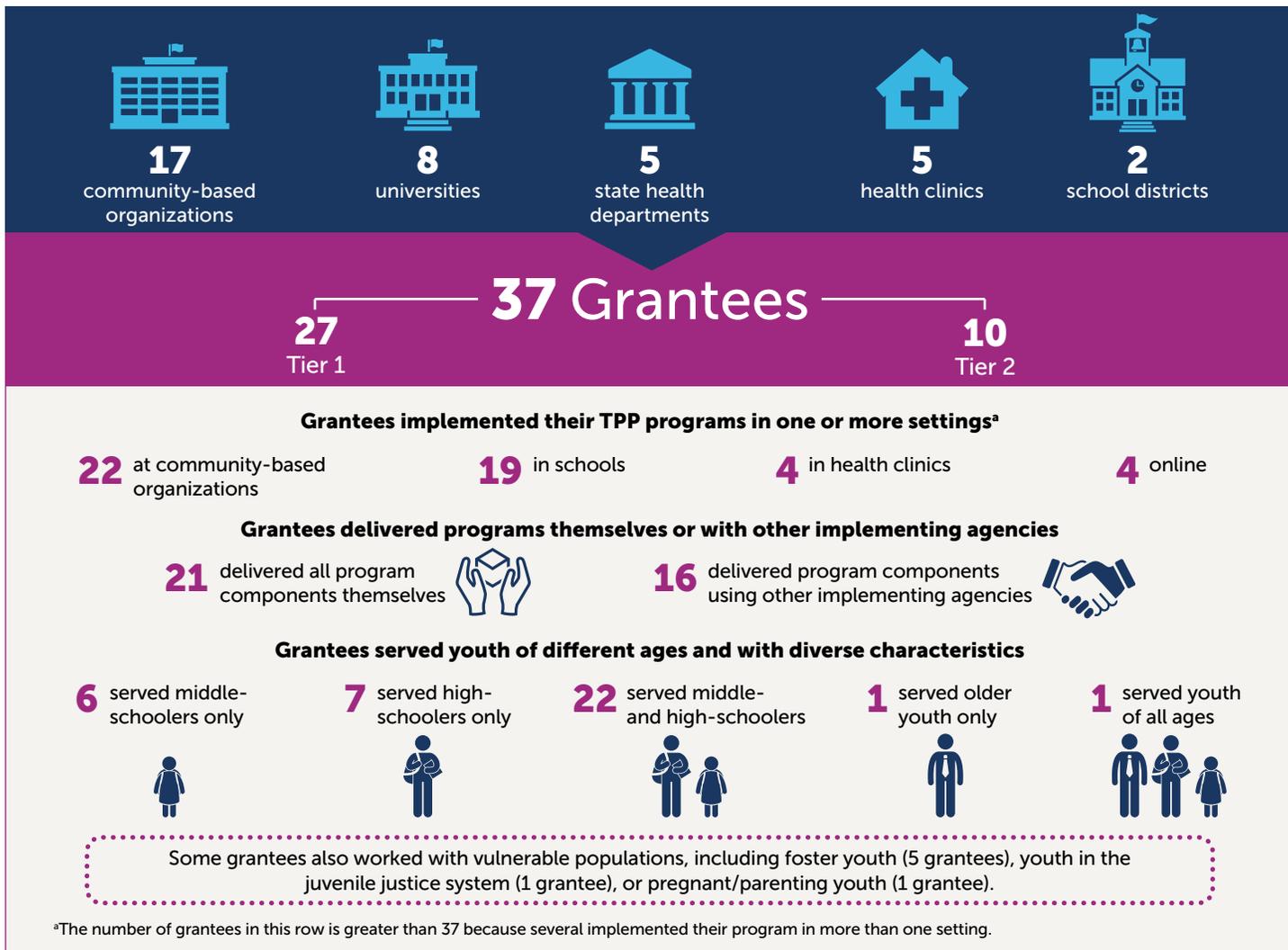
after the TPP grant period, either on their own or with assistance from partner organizations. The others that sustained their TPP programs no longer played any role in the program, but reported that other agencies, usually former partners on the TPP grant, continued to deliver the program. Nearly all of the grantees that sustained their program experienced some changes to their programs after the TPP grant ended. Among the 28 former grantees that sustained, 15 scaled-back the scope of their programs, eliminating some program components and/or serving fewer youth, to continue at a lower level of funding. In contrast, 10 grantees scaled-up the scope of their programs, adding new components and/or serving more youth, after their TPP grant ended. In addition, 10 grantees changed the target population that they served and 11 changed the setting where their programs were implemented.

Former TPP grantees that sustained their programs after the federal grant period highlighted five key strategies that enhanced sustainability: (1) identify or develop a program that is responsive to the needs of the community, (2) plan ahead for implementation both during and after the grant period, (3) mobilize champions for the program in the community, (4) integrate the program into local institutions, and (5) build the capacity of implementation partners early in the grant period. Grantees that were unable to sustain their programs reported several challenges implementing these strategies, such as issues with the fit and feasibility of their chosen program model, the amount of support for their program in the community, the timing of sustainability planning, and the capacity of their partner organizations (Sustainability Do's and Don'ts, end of brief). Grantees' ability to overcome these challenges and ultimately sustain their programs depended on a number of factors, including specific features of their organizational and implementation contexts.

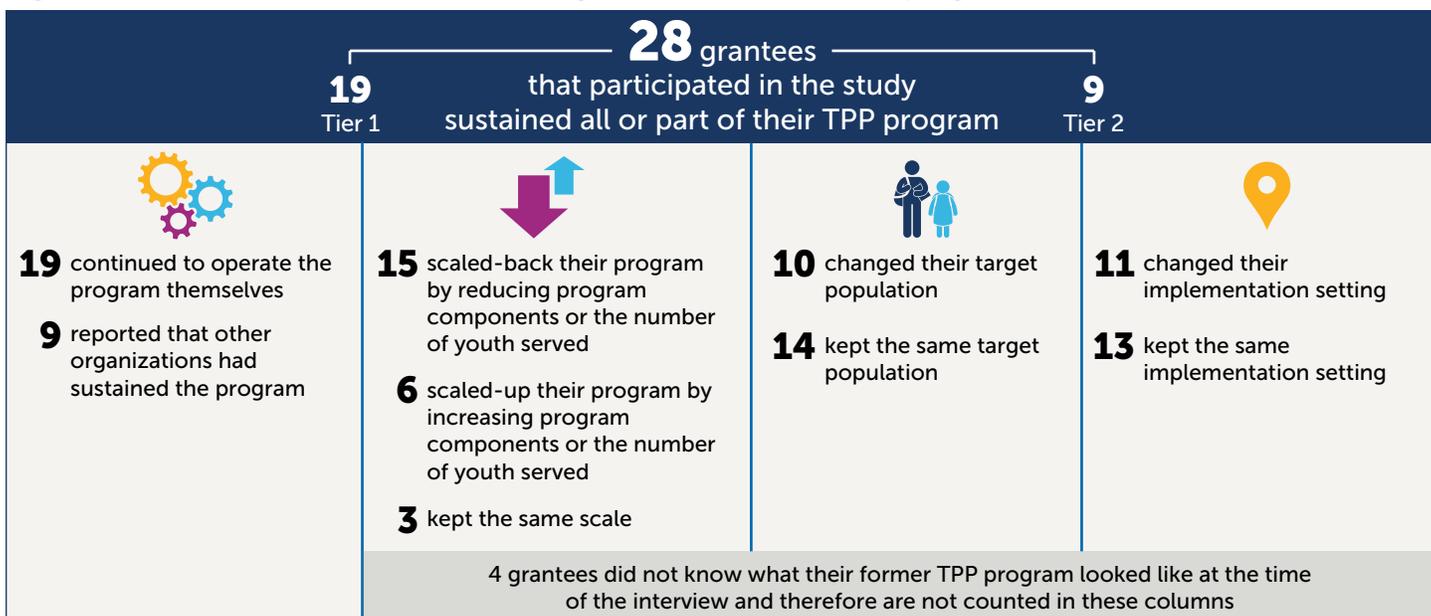
### About the Office of Adolescent Health's Teen Pregnancy Prevention program

OAH leads the Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) program, established in 2010 to fund diverse programs working to prevent teen pregnancy across the United States. The OAH TPP program seeks to prevent pregnancy and associated sexual risk behaviors in youth ages 10 to 19. The program funds competitive grants totaling \$100 million each year across two funding tiers: Tier 1 grants support the implementation and evaluation of evidence-based programs and Tier 2 grants support the development and evaluation of new and innovative programs. In 2010, OAH awarded the first cohort of 94 grantees (75 Tier 1 grantees and 19 Tier 2 grantees) for a five-year project period. Tier 1 grantees in 2010 could choose from a list of 28 program models identified by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Pregnancy Prevention Evidence Review. Grantees consisted of a mix of state and local agencies, including health departments, public school districts, universities, health clinics, and other community-based organizations.

**Figure 1:** Characteristics of former TPP grantees that participated in the study



**Figure 2:** How 28 of these 37 former TPP grantees sustained their programs



# Lesson

## 1

### Identify or develop a strong program model that is responsive to your community's needs

Programs that demonstrate direct relevance to the youth and families they serve are more likely to be sustained beyond a single funding cycle than programs that do not. It is important to ensure that the core content of the program addresses the needs of the target population. In addition, grantees emphasized that a sustainable program model must also resonate with the backgrounds, values, and experiences of youth and their families (see also Farb and Margolis 2016).

For example, several Tier 1 grantees decided to adapt elements of their chosen curriculum to fit the particular racial and ethnic or cultural backgrounds of their students. One grantee located in Hawaii produced new videos for its program containing local actors, settings, and storylines. The grantee worked with its partners to make these adaptations so the content would be consistent across sites and engaging to all youth enrolled in the program. Several grantees also discussed the importance of sensitivity to local values and perceptions about sex education and teen pregnancy prevention programs. Many chose to implement programs that provided a flexible and value-neutral approach to teaching youth about sex and healthy relationships. As one grantee explained about the benefits of flexible programming, “I’ve watched young people go through programs that are less adaptable and where people have to [explain] things a certain way. I’ve watched [facilitators] stick rigidly to the way something was written, and I’ve watched them fail for some groups of kids. There’s no such thing as one size fits all.”

In developing new, innovative programs, Tier 2 grantees also said they spent a substantial amount of time working with local stakeholders, organizations, and youth to create

programs tailored to their unique needs. Service providers often embraced these programs because they resonated with youth in a way that other sexual health offerings did not. This may have contributed to the higher sustainability rates of Tier 2 programs at the end of the TPP grant period because these programs were developed with a particular population, setting, and context in mind.

*Tier 2 grantees that worked with vulnerable populations, such as foster youth or youth in the juvenile justice system, reported that their communities often especially valued the programs they developed because these programs directly addressed the difficult circumstances of their participants.*

Despite the benefits of tailoring the program to fit the target population, it was a challenge for grantees to balance the desire to make adaptations while also maintaining fidelity to the program model. For example, one grantee wanted to add elements to its chosen curriculum to make it more relevant for tribal youth, such as information about coming of age in the tribal community. But the grantee decided against doing so because it believed the modifications would reduce fidelity and undermine the replication study. This grantee, which ultimately was unable to sustain its TPP program, felt that local schools and youth-serving organizations might have been more enthusiastic about adopting the program if adjustments had been made to ensure that the program resonated with participants. Some grantees overcame this challenge by working directly with program developers to make small adaptations to their program, such as replacing outdated examples in the curriculum with new content.

## Lesson

# 2

## Plan ahead so the program can be implemented both during and after the grant period

Former grantees that carefully considered their potential implementation contexts before choosing or developing a program were more likely to continue operating after the federal grant period, than former grantees that only focused on their immediate implementation needs. One strategy former grantees used was to select a flexible program model that could be delivered in several different settings. For instance, some former grantees that had initially planned to work only in schools ended up implementing their programs in several settings, including during the regular school day, after school, and on the weekends; choosing a curriculum that could accommodate this level of flexibility was essential for recruiting sites to participate in the program during and after the TPP grant period. Similarly, former grantees that delivered their programs in schools found that schools were more willing to work with them if they used a curriculum with lessons that could be adapted to accommodate different school schedules. Several grantees suggested that future technical assistance efforts should address how to increase a curriculum's flexibility to market it more broadly.

*Grantees found that building flexibility into their curriculum so it could be implemented across a variety of settings made it more appealing to potential users.*

Former grantees were also more likely to sustain their programs if they chose curricula they could adjust or scale-back in times of less funding. Most found it easier to sustain programs that could be delivered within a limited timeframe, because they generally had more inexpensive licensing fees, were less costly to staff, and could more easily be continued after the TPP grant. However, a few former grantees found ways to sustain more intensive programs while maintaining fidelity to the core program model by scaling back non-essential components. For example, one former grantee that implemented the Teen Outreach Program (TOP)—a nine-month program consisting of weekly group lessons and 20 hours of community service—decided to serve fewer students and discontinue optional components, such as field trips and

**Grantee Spotlight 1.** One health clinic used its 2010 TPP grant to deliver the Carrera program to students in two school districts. Students attended the program 5 days a week after school and over the summer, and also participated in field trips and internships in the community. After the grant ended, the grantee referred students to similar services in schools and the community, but was unable to sustain the Carrera program. In retrospect, the grantee felt they began planning for sustainability too late in the grant period, and without the federal grant, the program was too costly to implement with fidelity. Although they took a number of steps to identify additional funding after 2015, including developing marketing materials, contacting state and local representatives, and applying for new grants, ultimately these activities occurred too late in the grant period to bring in the necessary revenue. Based on this experience, they recommended that future grantees hire a staff member to focus on sustainability from the beginning of the grant period. They also recommended carefully selecting a program model that is feasible to implement even if funding is reduced. Although it may seem appealing to deliver a highly intensive program after being awarded a large grant, the community may actually benefit more from a less intensive program that is easier to sustain after the grant period ends.

community service retreats, after the end of its TPP grant. The former grantee received another, smaller grant from the state department of health that made it possible to continue delivering TOP's core components. Likewise, a former grantee that implemented Carrera—a highly intensive, multiyear program that offers services six days per week—dropped the mental health and job-training portions of the program, but used new funding from the state to continue the rest of the program components.

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In contrast, some former grantees that implemented intensive program models found them to be too long or costly to sustain after the grant period without sacrificing fidelity to the core program model (Grantee Spotlight 1). The length and cost of these programs also made it difficult to find partners to take over the program. Although schools and local organizations often valued these intensive programs and were grateful to receive services from grantees, most lacked the time and financial resources to continue the program themselves. In general, former grantees that could not sustain their programs reported that they should have started planning for

sustainability earlier in the grant period. As one grantee that did not sustain explained, “[Our] sustainability planning and action planning should’ve taken place much earlier.... When you get a five-year grant, year five seems like it’s far off, but it comes very fast.” Early planning was particularly essential for figuring out how to sustain more intensive programs. Although determining which components to retain and which to cut can be difficult, grantees that planned ahead and either chose shorter programs or found ways to scale-back more intensive ones were much more likely to sustain after the federal grant period.

### **OAH’s efforts to support program sustainability**

OAH defines a sustained program as one in which organizations “effectively leverage partnerships and resources to continue programs, services, and/or strategic activities that result in improvements in the health and well-being of adolescents.” Based on grantees’ early experiences and input from experts, in 2011 OAH developed a framework and toolkit to support grantees in developing sustainable programs and creating sustainable impacts. In 2017, OAH updated the framework and toolkit, which includes a new planning template, a resource guide, and an e-learning module (<https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/resources-and-training/tpp-and-paf-resources/community-mobilization-and-sustainability/index.html>).

In 2015, OAH launched a three-year study to better understand program sustainability after federal funding ends. The study focused on programs designed to prevent or delay teen pregnancy and examined whether and how grantees sustained programming. Two OAH initiatives in 2010 initially funded the programs or services in the study: the Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) program and the Pregnancy Assistance Fund (PAF) program.

Of the 111 TPP and PAF grantees that received funds in 2010, 71 (more than 60 percent) did not receive competitive funding in the second round, either because they did not reapply or their application was not funded. The sustainability study consisted of a review of grantees’ documents and up to two rounds of interviews with 43 former TPP and PAF grantees. In addition to the lessons discussed in this brief and an earlier brief (Asheer et al. 2017), three case studies will highlight successful strategies to help inform current and future efforts to sustain federally funded programs after funding ends.

## Lesson

# 3

## Mobilize local partners, beneficiaries, and champions for your program

Former TPP grantees that sustained their programs worked hard to gather buy-in from community members before and during the TPP grant period. Before applying for the grant, one grantee held a series of town hall meetings with community members, school staff, parents, and teens to discuss their needs related to preventing teen pregnancy and what their program should offer. Several other grantees offered open houses for parents and community members during the grant period to answer questions and provide information about what participants would learn during the program. Former grantees also discussed the importance of having program participants, parents, and staff raise awareness for their program in the community. Many had community outreach specialists and participants attend community events, such as parades or festivals, to advertise the program. Several organizations even developed logos and branding for their TPP programs so they would be visible in the community.

*Community members and organizations were more likely to invest time and resources to sustain programs that had demonstrated local support.*

Former grantees that sustained also built community trust by framing their programs in a way that would appeal to partners and stakeholders. Some grantees found that school and community leaders were initially unsure about

the need for teen pregnancy prevention programming in their schools. Providing additional context and highlighting the broader youth development aspects of the program garnered more support from potential partners. One grantee developed a script for staff to use when discussing sexual education with school and community groups to facilitate these conversations. For grantees that faced resistance to providing teen pregnancy prevention services, meeting regularly with local school boards or other government officials helped them develop trust and overcome community resistance. Grantees often found it helpful to use participants' success stories to demonstrate the benefits of their programs.

Turnover of key supporters in the community was also a challenge for sustainability. One former grantee reported that even though the school district in which it delivered services embraced its program at first, midway through the grant period the district's superintendent and director of health programming were replaced by individuals who were not interested in sustaining the program. As a result, the former grantee was unable to continue operating its program in the school district after the TPP grant period ended. To mitigate the negative effects of turnover, grantees suggested encouraging key supporters to discuss their endorsement of the program before they leave.

## Lesson

# 4

## Integrate the program into local institutions such as schools and community-based organizations

Former grantees that sustained their programs worked closely with institutions and service providers in the community to strategize ways to continue all or part of their programs without former grantees' direct involvement. Those that delivered programming in schools were especially well-positioned to integrate components of their programs into the regular school day. For example, one former grantee operated its program in a school district that received funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to develop its own comprehensive sexual education curriculum for middle and high school students. Staff from the grantee organization worked with school personnel to develop the new curriculum, which ultimately included several elements from the TPP program evaluated under the grant.

Demonstrating alignment with state education standards was also critical for institutionalizing programs in schools. During the grant period, several Tier 1 grantees modified portions of their chosen program models to ensure they met state standards for health and sexual education, thereby making it easier for schools and districts to adopt the programs. Many Tier 2 grantees also devoted significant time to learning state education requirements and tailoring their curricula to meet these standards.

*Grantees that aligned their programs with state standards often reported that it was the most influential step they took to ensure their programs would be sustained.*

Grantees that delivered services outside of a school setting also worked to integrate components of their programs into local institutions, including community-based organizations (CBOs) and businesses. Several grantees sustained all or part of their TPP programs through Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCAs, or similar organizations. Former grantees generally found it easier to approach CBOs about delivering elements of the TPP program if they were implementation partners on the grant, but in some cases former grantees worked with new sites to deliver teen pregnancy prevention services after the grant period. Other former grantees worked with local businesses and nonprofits to continue offering youth development and community service opportunities to the target population. For instance, one grantee that worked with youth in the foster care system established a community service network as part of its program. After the TPP grant ended, businesses and nonprofits in the network saw great value in continuing to offer service learning opportunities to foster youth and became strong supporters of the grantee organization. Although this grantee did not sustain its pregnancy prevention programming, the TPP grant helped it build local support and integrate other important services into the community.

# Lesson 5

## Build the capacity of implementing agencies to deliver programming early in the grant period

A final strategy grantees used to sustain their programs beyond the TPP grant period was to directly train implementing agency staff to deliver the program themselves. Although the majority of grantees delivered their programs on their own during the TPP grant period, others worked with staff at partner organizations, such as schools and CBOs, to implement the program. In some cases, grantee staff implemented the program alongside partner staff, whereas in other cases, partner staff delivered the entire TPP program on their own. Some grantees also offered training-of-trainer opportunities during the grant period so implementing agencies could continue to train new staff and keep the program going without grantees' continued presence. In general, this strategy of training staff at partner sites to deliver the program worked best if grantees started these activities early in the grant period. Grantees that approached their implementation partners about training opportunities near the end of the TPP grant period were much less likely to find staff at these agencies to continue the program.

Grantees also strengthened the capacity of their implementation partners by leading regular discussions about sustainability throughout the grant period. For example, one state health department reviewed OAH's sustainability toolkit with each of its four implementing agencies to develop sustainability action plans tailored to each site. This grantee also shared relevant funding

opportunities with these agencies during and after the TPP grant period. As a result, three of the four agencies that implemented the TPP program continued to offer services after the grant period ended.

*Grantees that worked with their implementation partners to develop sustainability plans were more likely to sustain after the federal grant period.*

For some grantees, the implementation setting and staff turnover posed significant challenges to building partners' capacity to sustain programming. Grantees that delivered their programs in rural settings, for instance, sometimes struggled to offer adequate support to staff at their implementation sites. High transportation costs and the time needed for travel posed challenges for training and monitoring implementation staff in rural locations. One former grantee overcame these challenges by developing an online facilitator training to train staff to deliver the program after the TPP grant period (Grantee Spotlight 2). High levels of turnover at partner organizations, particularly at CBOs, was another common concern. Several grantees devoted significant time and money to training their implementation partners, only to have key staff members leave these organizations. Offering training-of-trainer opportunities for partners was one strategy grantees used to ensure the continued success of TPP programs in high-turnover settings.

**Grantee Spotlight 2.** One grantee located in Hawaii that implemented its TPP program in schools, sustained the program by devising an innovative and cost-effective strategy to train teachers to deliver the curriculum. During the grant period, the grantee conducted in-person trainings for teachers delivering the program, as well as site monitoring visits to ensure the program was implemented with fidelity. However, because the schools delivering the program were geographically isolated on different islands, these trainings and visits were costly and ultimately not sustainable after the TPP grant ended. To overcome this challenge, the grantee developed an online facilitator training course and website containing resources for schools to use as they implement the program. The training is free and consists of a series of lessons and quizzes that teachers must pass to become certified to teach the curriculum. Ultimately, this strategy helped the grantee expand the reach of its program after the TPP grant period ended.

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## Conclusion

Sustaining a program with evolving implementation needs and limited funding is a difficult task in any context. Federal grants can bolster an organization's capacity and provide support for program expansion for only a relatively short time. However, to continue serving their communities, grantees must plan and take steps to sustain their programs, in some cases before they even apply for the grant.

Former TPP grantees who participated in this study highlighted five important strategies for sustainability, as well as some common pitfalls to avoid. First, the program must fit the target community's needs. Whether they chose an existing program or developed a new one, former grantees found it vital to assess the local context and tailor the program to ensure relevance for its beneficiaries. Second, grantees must think carefully about what is feasible for them and their partners to implement, both during and after the federal grant period. Former grantees that sustained their programs considered all relevant logistics and chose a program they could adjust to changing implementation and funding constraints. Third, grantees should cultivate and mobilize local champions, beneficiaries, and community leaders to build support for program sustainability. Engaging with and inviting input from youth and their families helped former TPP grantees develop trust and address community concerns directly.

Fourth, for a program to be sustainable in the long term, it is helpful to integrate it into local institutions, such as schools or CBOs. Former grantees reported that schools and districts were more likely to continue programs that met their needs and were valuable for their communities. Grantees found it especially helpful to align their programs with school or district requirements for sexual health education. Finally, building the capacity of partner staff is critical so other agencies can continue implementing the program on their own. Successful grantees began building capacity early in the grant period by training school and CBO staff, and by developing sustainability plans in collaboration with partner agencies.

## References

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- Farb, Amy Feldman and Amy L. Margolis. "The Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program (2010–2015): Synthesis of Impact Findings." *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 106, no. S1, 2016, pp. S9–S15.

## SUSTAINABILITY DO'S AND DON'TS

In 2015, the Office of Adolescent Health (OAH) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services launched a study designed to better understand whether and how programs supported by federal funding were sustained after their grant funding ends. Our second brief (Sustaining Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs) highlights lessons and challenges informed by former OAH Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) grantees' sustainability efforts.

The Do's and Don'ts described here summarize the lessons in the Brief and could be useful for future grantees in planning for sustainability beyond the federal grant period.

**1. DO identify or develop a strong program model that is responsive to your community's needs.** Programs that resonate with the backgrounds, values, and experiences of the target population are more likely to be sustained.

**2. DO plan ahead so the program can be implemented during and after the grant period.** Before you choose a program, assess the flexibility of your chosen program model. It is easier to sustain programs that can be implemented in a variety of settings and scaled-back if funding is reduced.

**3. DO mobilize local partners, beneficiaries, and champions for your program.** Outreach events and regular communication with key stakeholders in the community can build support for sustaining programs, especially when new or alternate funding is required.

**4. DO integrate the program into local institutions such as schools and community-based organizations.** Work with implementation partners early in the grant period to devise a plan for continuing, at minimum, the core components of your program after the grant ends.

**5. DO start building the capacity of implementing agencies early in the grant period.** Train staff at partner organizations to deliver the program, offer training-of-trainer opportunities, and lead regular discussions about sustainability in order to build partners' capacity to continue your program.

**1. DON'T choose a program that is a poor match for your target population and implementation setting.** Programs that do not fit the needs of the target population or the implementation setting are less likely to be sustained. Before choosing a program, it is important to consider what your population and setting may look like both during and after the grant period.

**2. DON'T get discouraged by community resistance to your program.** Although community resistance can make sustainability challenging, it is important to work through this issue by cultivating program champions and collaborating with participants and key stakeholders to speak-out in support of your program.

**3. DON'T wait until it's too late to begin integrating your program into local institutions.** Be proactive and work with implementing organizations throughout the grant period to figure out how to sustain key program components.

**4. DON'T assume implementing agencies have the capacity and resources to continue your program.** Limited resources and high levels of turnover at partner organizations are common obstacles to sustainability.