Literature Review of Program Sustainability Assessment Tools

Submitted to
Marla Steinberg
The CAPTURE Project

by
Kylie Hutchinson
Community Solutions Planning & Evaluation
ph: (604) 629-6872
kylieh@communitysolutions.ca
www.communitysolutions.ca

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Introduction

There have been many studies over the past fifteen years investigating the determinants of sustainability. A literature review of this research conducted previously by Community Solutions in 2004 concluded there were 34 possible determinants (Hutchinson, 2004). A summary of these determinants is presented in Figure 1. It is interesting to note from this figure the significant amount of overlap between these determinants of sustainability and general best practices for organizational management.

There are also four different definitions of sustainability that prevail in the literature:

- the continuation of successful pilot programs after major or seed funding is terminated
- the capacity to continue to deliver a program through a network of agencies, in addition to or instead of, the agency which initiated the program (“spinning off”)
- the extent to which pilot programs or new practices become “taken up” and embedded as core programs or practices within an institution or host agency (“institutionalization”)
- the maintenance of program benefits in a community over the long-term through the development of increased community capacity (Centre for Civic Partnerships, 2001; Goodman et al., 1993; Hawe, et al., 2000; Shadian-Rizhallah, 1998.)

It is also possible to view each of these definitions as falling on a “continuum” of sustainability ranging from the simple continuation of pilot projects to the long-term maintenance of benefits in community.

Scheier (2005) conducted a review of 19 evaluations of sustainability and proposed the following typology:

- sustainability of the issue
- sustainability of the program
- sustainability of the behavior change
- sustainability of the partnership

However, Scheier concludes from her review that at present the literature does not support a single set of measures to assess sustainability. This is in accordance with our findings. There has been very little rigorous measurement of the validity and reliability of the tools presently available. In a comprehensive review of program sustainability, The Altarum Institute (2009) summarizes additional challenges in developing tools for assessing sustainability:

- lack of a common definition of sustainability, e.g. is it sustainability of the program, or sustainability of the health benefits? (see above)
- lack of rigorous studies identifying the determinants of sustainability
- lack of agreement regarding the most appropriate determinants to measure
- lack of longitudinal studies assessing sustainability over the long-term
- lack of rigorous testing of the validity and reliability of sustainability assessment tools
The following report documents an extensive search of both the academic and grey literature in this area and provides a brief summary and analysis of the tools available for assessing sustainability.
Figure 1: Determinants of Program Sustainability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FUNDING</th>
<th>PLANNING &amp; EVALUATION</th>
<th>PROGRAM DESIGN &amp; IMPLEMENTATION</th>
<th>PARTNERS</th>
<th>PERSONNEL</th>
<th>HOST AGENCY FACTORS</th>
<th>BROADER COMMUNITY FACTORS</th>
<th>COMMUNICATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Adequate Funding  
• Sufficient Resources to Generate Initial Successes  
• Diverse Sources of Funding  
• Multi-year Funding  
• Realistic Program Budget  
• High Levels of In-Kind Resources and Services | • Sustainability Plan  
• Multiple Sustainability Strategies  
• Demonstrated Effectiveness (Evaluation)  
• Clear Vision and Program Goals  
• Continuity in Vision and Program Goals | • Responds to a Clear Need  
• Originates from Community  
• Reflects Community Values and Culture  
• Train the Trainer Component  
• Number of Years in Operation  
• Flexibility and Adaptability  
• Careful Selection of Dissemination Sites | • Collaborative Partners  
• Program Champions  
• Support From a Credible Institution | • Strong Leadership  
• Continuity in Leadership, Staff, and Advisory Board  
• Program Uses Local Program Staff  
• Funder Involvement  
• Strong Base of Committed Volunteers | • Receptive Host Agency  
• Program Mission Aligns with Host Agency’s  
• Stable Host Agency  
• Pilot Becomes a Core Program Within Host Agency  
• Program Activities Become Policy/Law | • Strong and Diverse Forms of Community Participation and Support  
• Support From Local Government, Policy Makers And Businesses | • High Visibility in Community |
Methodology

An outline of the search strategy and search terms used is presented in Table 1. Eighty-three articles were initially reviewed, yielding a total of 33 articles with possible tools for examination. Using a template, article extractions were prepared for each of the 33 articles reviewed (see Appendix A).

Table 1: Summary of Search Strategy and Search Terms Used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search Strategy</th>
<th>Search Terms (used interchangeably)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Google</td>
<td>• [program] sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Google Scholar</td>
<td>• planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• EVALTALK archives (10 years)</td>
<td>• assessing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• EVALTALK list serve posting</td>
<td>• assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation</td>
<td>• measurement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• CES grey literature</td>
<td>• tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• American Journal of Program Evaluation</td>
<td>• toolkit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Journal of Evaluation &amp; Program Planning</td>
<td>• index</td>
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<tr>
<td>• direct communication with known researchers in the area</td>
<td>• checklist</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lydia Marek, Virginia Tech</td>
<td>• indicators</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Pierre Pluye, McGill</td>
<td>• resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meg Small, Univ. of Maryland</td>
<td>• evaluating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mary Ann Scheirer, Scheirer Consulting, Princeton, NJ</td>
<td>• evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Daniela Schroter, Western Michigan University</td>
<td>• workbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• CONSULTANTS list serve posting (North American consultants working in the not-for-profit sector)</td>
<td>• self-assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>• SAGE Publications</td>
<td>• institutionalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The Health Communication Unit, University of Toronto (<a href="http://www.thcu.ca">www.thcu.ca</a>)</td>
<td>• uptake</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Centre for Sustainability (<a href="http://www.centreforsustainability.org">www.centreforsustainability.org</a>)</td>
<td>• longevity</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <a href="http://learningforsustainability.net/">http://learningforsustainability.net/</a></td>
<td>• continuation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The Community Toolbox, University of Kansas (<a href="http://ctb.ku.edu/en">http://ctb.ku.edu/en</a>)</td>
<td>• legacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Rose Soneff, Program Manager, Community Capacity Building Strategy, BC Healthy Living Alliance, Canadian Cancer Society, BC and Yukon Division</td>
<td>• routinization</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• durability</td>
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<td>• self-reliance</td>
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</table>
Results

Out of the 33 article extractions, a total of 16 distinct sustainability assessment tools were identified as being potentially useable and/or adaptable for CAPTURE’s purposes (see Table 2). Only four of these tools reported any kind of psychometric testing in the results. Four specifically measured degree of institutionalization, i.e. the extent to which innovations become integrated as core programs or practices within an organization. Ten of the tools were part of planning guides for achieving sustainability and two came with just the instrument.

Table 2: Summary of Sustainability Assessment Tools Reviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Article Number</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Articles Initially Reviewed</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>(see References)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Articles with Sustainability Assessment Tools</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1, 5, 8, 9, 10, 14, 21, 22, 23, 27, 33, 36, 37, 39, 45, 51, 52, 53, 58, 60, 61, 62, 65, 77, 78, 79, 80, 84, 85, 87, 91, 93, 95</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tools Potentially Usable/Adaptable</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8, 9, 10, [14/22/93/95]¹, 23, 27, 33, [36/37]², 51, 52, 61, 65, 77, 79, 80, 87, 91</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tools With Psychometrics</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>[36/37],[ 14/22/93/95], 27, 91</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tools Assessing Level of Institutionalization</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>[14/22/93/95], 33, 51, 87</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tools with Accompanying Planning Guides</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8, 9, 10, 23, 33, 52, 65, 77, 79</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tools without Planning Guides</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>51, 61, 87, 80</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tools Requiring Professional Administration</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools Completed Online</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools Requiring a Fee</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Selection of Tools</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8, 9, 10, [14/22/93/95], 27, [36/37], 51, 52, 65, 77, 79, 80, 91</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Tables 3 to 6 below present a brief analysis of the 17 tools identified as potentially usable/adaptable. (For more detail on each tool please refer to the article extractions in Appendix A.)

¹ Each of these articles refer to the same instrument.
² Both of these articles refer to the same instrument.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#8</td>
<td>The Health Communication Unit’s Sustainability Worksheet Package</td>
<td>• very detailed (82 items)</td>
<td>• lack of a scoring mechanism</td>
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<tr>
<td>#9</td>
<td>Waterloo Region: Building Sustainable Non-profits</td>
<td>• nice format</td>
<td>• more of an organizational assessment tool, although has some relevant questions, wish it included more sustainability factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10</td>
<td>RAND Checklist for Accountability: Sustainability</td>
<td>• simple checklist (38 items)</td>
<td>• not as detailed as #77, 79, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#23</td>
<td>Moving Forward: A Sustainability Planning Guide</td>
<td>• nice checklist of “how-to” steps</td>
<td>• not really an assessment tool, but could be modified</td>
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<tr>
<td>#33</td>
<td>NHS Sustainability Model and Guide</td>
<td>• user-friendly</td>
<td>• measures institutionalization</td>
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<td>• ease of administration</td>
<td>• fee</td>
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<td>• complete online</td>
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<td>• generates score</td>
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<td>• generates progress graphs</td>
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<td>#52</td>
<td>ARACY Sustainability Tool</td>
<td>• based on clear lit review</td>
<td>• could be good, but doesn’t show you an actual copy of the questionnaire</td>
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<tr>
<td>#65</td>
<td>SAMHA Tool</td>
<td>• wide variety of self-assessment tools and checklists for various sustainability factors</td>
<td>• not one discrete tool, would have to cut and paste</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• very extensive</td>
<td>• stronger focus on organizational assessment vs. program sustainability</td>
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<tr>
<td>#77</td>
<td>Heart Health Sustainability Workbook</td>
<td>• very detailed (112 items)</td>
<td>• no scoring</td>
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<td>• nice breakdown into sustaining the issue/program/behavior change/and partnership</td>
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<td>• Canadian context?</td>
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<tr>
<td>#79</td>
<td>The Finance Project’s Sustainability Self-Assessment Tool</td>
<td>• very detailed (50 items)</td>
<td>• ?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4: Assessment Tools Only

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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</table>
| #51     | University of Montreal Sustainability Tool Kit | • simple assessment of institutionalization  
• Canadian context? | • seems a bit simplistic, missing some key factors of sustainability |
| #80     | Kylie’s Sustainability Assessment Tool     | • covers extensive number of sustainability factors | • simplistic, no scoring  
• based on literature up to 2004 |
| #61     | WMU Sustainability Checklist               | • ?                                                                       | • very simplistic                                                                                   |
| #87     | (Qualitative) Level of Institutionalization Scale | • ?                                                                       | • requires professional facilitator                                                             |

### Table 5: Tools with Psychometrics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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| #27     | NSW Health Sustainability Checklist        | • short and quick (14 items)  
• includes other health promotion capacity-building checklists that might be relevant | • not as detailed as #36                                                                 |
| #[36/37]| Program Sustainability Index (PSI)        | • very detailed (49 items)  
• based on authors’ extensive research on predictors of sustainability | • needs more refinement and testing                                                               |
| #[14/22/93/95]| Level of Institutionalization Scale | • used in different settings and has undergone numerous revisions | • needs more refinement and testing                                                               |
| #91     | Community Ownership Assessment            | • measures an important determinant of sustainability  
• short and quick (14 items) | • only measures this one construct                                                               |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article Number</th>
<th>Program Design &amp; Implementation</th>
<th>Communications &amp; Marketing</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Community Support</th>
<th>Collaboration/Partnerships</th>
<th>Relevance/Need</th>
<th>Funding/Finance</th>
<th>Vision/Strategic Planning</th>
<th>Flexibility/Adaptability</th>
<th>Host Organization Fit &amp; Management</th>
<th>Champions</th>
<th>Sustainability Plan</th>
<th>Institutionalization Factors</th>
<th>Volunteers/Training</th>
<th>Staff Involvement</th>
<th>Diffusion</th>
<th>Other</th>
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3 Domains are not presented in order of importance.
Following this review, a further three tools were dropped from consideration because of their lack of substance, requirement for professional administration, and cost. A decision tree was created from these remaining 14 tools to guide their choice in terms of type of sustainability assessed, length of tool, availability of psychometric evidence, and accompanying planning guide or not (see Figure 2).
References

By Number


**Alphabetical**


Center for Civic Partnerships. (2001). *Sustainability toolkit: 10 steps to maintaining your community improvements.* Sacramento: Centre of the Public Health.


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**Articles Reviewed in 2004**


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Appendix A

Article Extractions
Contact The CAPTURE Project

Simon Fraser University
8888 University Drive
WMC Room 2805
Burnaby, BC V5A 1S6
Telephone: 778.782.6707
Fax: 778.782.3055
Website: www.thecaptureproject.ca
Email: info@thecaptureproject.ca