Sustain**ability**

Technical Assistance Report (TAR)

This TAR packet contains:

- Sustainability Technical Assistance Report
- Sustainability Model
- Sustainability Planning Template

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Sustaining Change

A Technical Assistance Report

Introduction

What is the Technical Assistance Report Series (TARS)?

The Technical Assistance Report Series (TARS) consists of a compendium of short reports structured on key process improvement topics. Each report in this series will provide introductory tools and guidance, pose key questions, and highlight provider and payer experiences that demonstrate effective application of methods to improve access to and retention in addiction treatment.

Who should read the Technical Assistance Report Series?

The TARS is designed for any individual or team wishing to maximize likelihood of success in organizational change efforts. The examples presented pertain to addiction treatment processes, although many of the concepts illustrated can be adapted and applied in various industry settings.

Setting the Scene for Sustainability

This TAR shares useful information and practical tips associated with the sustainability of organizational process improvement. It provides an easy-to-read overview of sustainability, a self-assessment tool, a sustainability planning template, and a compendium of ideas and projects tried, tested, and sustained within the NIATx collaborative.

Core message: *Sustainability is an essential and integral part of change. Sustainability requires as much effort as the implementation of a project and should be considered from the beginning of any project. A Change Team that uses key tools and initiates projects with the intent of sustaining them will provide significant, long-term contributions to the organization.*

What is sustainability?

In this report, sustainability refers to the continuity of a Change Project, and the associated positive performance outcomes, beyond a six-month period following implementation. Sustainability incorporates the concept of continuous improvement, where initial changes adapt and evolve as necessary for gains to continue. Any process change that reverts back to the old process (way of working) or the old performance level is not considered to be sustained.

What does the evidence suggest?

Although sustainability evidence is sparse and largely inconclusive, experience from various organizations and industries suggests that there is not one universal formula for sustaining change. Rather, it seems likely that several factors affecting sustainability are relevant across industries, with

other factors having context-specific value. The featured ten-factor Sustainability Model (see attached) was designed with a general health care focus and many of the factors can also be applied to other fields. The Model provides a neat framework for organizations to consider as they design, implement, monitor and sustain change. In addition, organizations should consider other factors unique to their context that may influence sustainability.

Implications for Access and Retention

Why is sustainability important?

Change is essential for any organization wishing to excel in achieving strategic goals. One primary objective shared by all agencies participating in the NIATx collaborative is to exert a positive and lasting impact on access to and retention in addiction treatment. Changes that only survive for short periods, such as a few weeks, may contribute something initially; however, this will not have the permanent impact on access and retention that is so desperately needed. Thus, the only true way of achieving this goal is through the implementation of changes that, if sustained, provide benefits to clients, staff, and the organization.

Sustained changes will give clients:

- A consistently higher standard of treatment from first contact to completion
- More certainty and clearer expectations during treatment
- The opportunity to get timely access and admission to treatment services
- The opportunity to receive treatment that promotes continuity and successful outcomes

Sustained changes will give staff:

- A higher level of certainty, clarity, and engagement in their working environment
- A better understanding of their relative roles and responsibilities
- More manageable daily workloads, allowing them to do today's work today
- Heightened satisfaction and reduced stress when good changes are sustained

Sustained changes will give the organization:

- Standardized and efficient processes
- A reduction in staff turnover
- Increased revenue, boosting the bottom-line (the business case)

Sustained change will also give the organization a set of streamlined, efficient processes that enable them to:

- Get people into treatment in a timely manner
- Get more people admitted to treatment
- Get more people to show up for treatment
- Get more people to stay in treatment for the first four sessions and beyond.

Why is sustainability a challenge?

Due to the high level of uncertainty that naturally exists with any kind of change, even organizations previously successful at sustaining change are not guaranteed success in all cases. Drawing some parallels to the behavior change associated with addiction treatment, a client showing signs of success today can have an experience tomorrow that may threaten recovery and cause relapse. Similarly, a change that has been running smoothly for several weeks might be instantly thrown off-course by some unexpected factor. Both cases demonstrate that initial positive results are no guarantee of long-term success. This is where planning for sustainability from the outset is important in dealing with some of this uncertainty, so that improvements towards access and retention can be maintained well into the future.

The *sustainability planning template* (attached) encourages teams to identify potential threats (red flags) that may arise down the line and compromise sustainability. Example red flags include turnover of project personnel, conflicting priorities, pessimistic views of change, and so on. Thinking about these things early on and identifying solutions to address them can only increase the likelihood of successful & continuous improvement.

Discussion Questions for Senior Leaders

When thinking about sustainability, either for your organization in general or for a specific project, you may wish to consider the following questions to prompt discussion:

- Are we good at sustaining change? What are our strengths and weaknesses?
- Do we have a sustainability plan? Is it used and reviewed regularly?
- Do we think about sustainability from the front-end of our Change Projects?
- Do we regularly take time to consider sustainability, for example, in team meetings?
- Do we have a sustainability "owner" responsible for ensuring and monitoring sustainability?
- Could we do more to increase our chances of sustaining change? What could we do?

Team Activity:

As a team, complete the following sentence*: If we sustain change, we will be a better organization because…*

Self-Assessment Diagnostic Tool

Sustainability Model (Maher, Gustafson, & Evans, 2004):

WHY use this tool?

This tool should be used to self-assess your organization on numerous factors determined by healthcare experts to be essential for sustaining change. This will give you the opportunity to understand "where you are now" and opens up discussions for "where you want to be" and "how you are going to get there."

WHO should use this tool?	Any team undertaking or engaged in a Change Project.
HOW to use this tool?	This tool should capture the perspectives of *all* members within a team. Each member of the team should be asked to complete the task discretely, without input from others. Once all members have completed the task, the team should join together and discuss responses to each sustainability factor. This will likely unveil discrepancies in opinion that should be explored through discussion, and a consensus should be reached for each factor.
WHEN to use this tool?	The sustainability tool can be useful at any time to check the status of a given project. It is recommended that the tool be used: • During project planning, to guide thinking • At implementation • 1, 3, 6 and 12 months post-implementation; • At any other time considered necessary by a Change Leader
WHAT to do with the results?	Completion of the model will likely reveal some areas (factors) of weakness for a Change Project. Teams should focus on at least one weakness and set a goal for improving it. Generate and agree to use one or more strategies to accomplish this. Check the progress made in that area the next time this tool is used.

The Sustainability Model is attached this report. It is also available online at www.NIATx.net. Please contact info@niatx.net for access information.

Effective Practices

Many provider agencies within NIATx have been able to sustain the new ways of working and new performance levels that have resulted from change. Here are examples of effective practices to sustain changes used by four NIATx agencies:

Change Implemented	Improvements/gains	Sustainability Duration	Sustainability tips
To reduce wait time to assessments *Gateway to Prevention and Recovery:* • Made appointments no more than five working days from first contact • Eliminated unnecessary paperwork, shifting some information collection from clinical staff to support staff • Used computer-based self-assessments • Double-booked assessments • Offered walk-ins four days per week Baseline data for Nov–Dec 2004 was 14 days to assessment; no-show rate 37%.	• By December 2005, virtually all assessments were walk-ins (0 days to assessment). • Consequently, no-shows to assessment dropped to 0%. • Days to treatment were reduced from over 80 days in November 2004 to less than a week in August 2006.	• Despite changes in the clinic's workforce, the project began its sustain period in December 2005, one year following implementation of the Change Project.	• Have listening sessions with consumers to clear up false assumptions about consumer needs.

Change Implemented	Improvements/gains	Sustainability Duration	Sustainability tips
To reduce no-shows to admissions *PORT Human Services:* • Implemented reminder phone calls and letters • Increased physician availability • Provided same-day physician appointments and dosing Baseline data for no-shows was 20% and admissions were 107 in 2004.	• After implementing the changes, no-shows decreased to 11%. • Admissions increased to 178 in 2005 (a 60% increase). • As of July 2006, there is a decrease in physician availability due to the increase demand for services.	• PORT Human Services implemented the project in April 2004, and the project began its sustain period by the end of that year. The changes are still being sustained.	• It is critical that program managers and supervisors understand the importance of spread and sustainability. • Management must understand that fostering sustainability and spread is an important part of their role in a treatment agency.
To reduce no-shows to intake *PROTOTYPES*: • Implemented motivational interviewing with outpatient clients during clinical assessment Baseline, pre-change data showed a three-month average rate (October–December 2004) of 36% for intake no-shows.	• Following implementation of motivational interviewing during clinical assessment, no-shows to intake dropped to an annual average of 10.08% (January–December 2005). • From January–June 2006, the gains observed because of this Change Project continued to improve, with an average no-show rate of 2.45%.	• Eight months after beginning the change project (August 2005), the Change Team shifted to sustaining the gains they had generated. The project has been sustained for over one year.	• Keep actively pursuing continuation of change behavior with staff. • Continue daily, weekly, and monthly measures to ensure changes are being implemented and gains are continuing. • Make sure all staff that may be involved in the project are properly trained. At PROTOTYPES, additional staff members are cross-trained to perform assessments, so the Change Team ensured these extra staff members were trained in motivational interviewing techniques.
To reduce wait times and no-shows to assessment *Southwest Florida Addiction Services (SWFAS)*: • Required clinicians to meet a productivity goal of 20 hours of direct service per week. The Change Leader, monitored clinician productivity and provided feedback to clinicians. • Implemented walk-in appointments Monday–Wednesday, between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. for self-referrals and clients referred by the Department of Children and Families (DCF). For the 12 months prior to the Change Project, the average number of assessments per month was 112. The no-show rate for Court-Related Services (CRS) clients was 60% and staff completed four assessments for self- and DCF-referred clients per week.	• The average number of direct service hours rose by 13.5% from February to April 2005. • The average number of assessments rose from 112 to 122 per month. • Wait time to assessment for CRS clients decreased from five weeks to less than one week (December 2004 – June 2005) • No-show rate for CRS assessments decreased from 60% to 44%. • Assessments for DCF and self-referred clients doubled from an average of four to an average of eight per week. • Time to assessment equalled 4.7 calendar days.	• By October 2005, nine months after the Change Project began, SWFAS shifted to sustaining their gains. Holidays and staff vacations, as well as hurricane season, have had adverse effects on some of the measures, but the Change Team has been discussing solutions to this problem.	• Designate one person to track a specific measure, such as time until the next available appointment. • Keep measurement simple. Measures that require a lot of time to track do not result in timely feedback. • Have a team set a target and let everyone on staff know. • Give regular feedback on your measures to all staff in the department, celebrating when the target is met, and prompting action when it is not. • Provide regular feedback to the Executive Sponsor. He or she can provide congratulation or support when necessary.

What action should I take?

- Start initiating a plan for sustainability.
- Share this TAR with your team:
    - Complete the Sustainability Planning Template
    - Complete the self-assessment Sustainability Model
- Get your team in the mindset for sustainability.

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