



# The Challenge of Sustaining a Grant-Funded Program

**Don't get caught in the catch-22 of sustainability. Here's how to look at the concept in a whole new way.**

By William C. Minnis

**T**oday's funders require sustainability. That is, they want nonprofits to assure them that the programs they support will continue even after the funding ends. And yet the fact that they grant funds for specific purposes and limited amounts of time makes sustainability difficult or impossible. Here are five suggestions nonprofits can use to resolve this catch-22 of sustainability:

## 1. Plan for sustainability when the proposal is written.

Many nonprofits write funding proposals with only the new service needs in mind. As a result, sustainability is difficult and expensive. Think of realistic ways to continue the program when funds run out. Design the grant to include such solutions as coalition development, public service promotion, capital equipment and facilities, new fund development, foundation endowment accounts, and volunteer systems based on in-kind contributions. Make sure sustainability is part of the evaluation process.

## 2. Identify and pursue new sources of funds from the beginning.

Don't put off sustainability efforts. If you wait till the end of the funding period, it's often too late to find new resources. Sustainability requires as much strategic planning as programs and initial funding requests. For the best chance of success, start early in the funding cycle.

## 3. Use program growth and success as priorities over just sustainability.

It will be easier for you to sustain programs if they are highly valued and have high growth potential. Such programs have the potential to sustain themselves through local support, broad awareness, and participants' enthusiasm.

## 4. Discuss sustainability challenges with funders.

Funders may have suggestions for ways to continue funding after the grant. They may be interested in sustaining your program's *impact* rather than the program itself. Additional ways of considering sustainability include measuring, for example:

- increased public awareness
- trained providers remaining in the community
- spin-off operations
- impact from services already delivered
- solving the problems that were the focus of the grant.

## 5. Take an entrepreneurial approach to generate revenue.

It's time to consider sustainability in a new way. Look at it as a broad strategy that's driven by your mission, not by grantmakers. Keep your eye out for entrepreneurial opportunities related to your goals, and never rely on just one source of

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funds. Pursue enterprises, fees for services, and other aggressive approaches. Many new programs can easily generate revenue if they're designed for efficiency and value. ■

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### RESOURCES

- **Seven Deadly Grantwriting Sins** (Vol. 27, No. 6)
- **Nonprofits & Funders: Two Sides of the Same Coin?** (Vol. 24, No. 4)
- **Two Keys to Successful Grant Proposals** (Vol. 15, No. 3)
- **The Joys of Risk** (Vol. 28, No. 3)
- **Grant Writers' Other Role** (Vol. 18, No. 4)

These resources are available at [www.snpo.org/members](http://www.snpo.org/members). Also see Learning Institute programs online: Resource Development and O for Opportunity: Exploring New Revenue Opportunities for Nonprofits ([www.snpo.org/lino](http://www.snpo.org/lino)).

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