SYNOPSIS: Sustaining Your YARG Program

The May webinar provided an in-depth look at how a solid sustainability approach from Day One can support program continuation and future growth. Our DOL/ETA moderator Sheila Lewis was joined by grantee coach Mike Laidlaw and grantee representatives from CareerWise (Hollis Salway) and Trident Technical College (Melissa Stowasser) to:

- Discuss sustainability as four years of continuous improvements – not simply a Year-4 action.
- Consider which program components, partnerships, and systems to sustain.
- Highlight the critical role and impact of partnerships on sustainability.
- Demonstrate how innovative, deliberate planning and timely execution enables sustainability.
- Provide examples of how program results can lead to additional funding opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

Grantees may believe that sustainability is a task that need not be addressed until a few years into the grant and that it focuses purely on funding. In fact, it is an issue that should be considered from the outset. And while funding is one major aspect, a robust sustainability effort encompasses the future life and strength of the entire program.

It is helpful to approach the concept by breaking it into three components:

1. Planning
2. Thinking & Mindset
3. Execution

SUSTAINABILITY PLANNING

Strategy

A game plan for sustainability should be part of every grantee’s strategic planning process and should be imbedded in the goals and objectives of every program. Partnerships and alliances must be considered in this planning process as they are crucial to long-term growth.

Prioritize and Document

Continuously improving processes and practices is fundamental to a program’s future life and success, as is retaining the knowledge and the effective practices that have already been tried. Documenting best practices, lessons learned, success stories, and ROI will provide reliable information for making program enhancements and modifications – and supply data and anecdotal evidence that can be used to seek additional funding and partnerships.

Results

Designating tasks and areas to be measured is the best way to assure that important components receive the attention they deserve. What gets measured gets done! This data will also demonstrate the impact of your program and its value to your community and the populations you serve.
SUSTAINABILITY THINKING & MINDSET
How we view Apprenticeship
Sustainability is all about having a long-term approach, so it needs to be top of mind on a day-to-day basis from the very early stages of a program. If the ultimate goal is to have a positive community impact, framing sustainability in terms of continuous improvement is what makes that goal achievable.

Staying Abreast of Ongoing Changes
Of course, nothing is constant. There will be changes, both planned and unforeseen. They may be internal: changes to the program itself or to your policies, structure, or support systems. They may be external: reversals in the economy, new developments in industry, technology, or politics. Any one of these may impact your sustainability planning and execution. Practitioners should monitor the issues and areas that might affect their programs and be flexible enough to adjust accordingly.

SUSTAINABILITY EXECUTION
Evaluating Current State and Desired State
With a sustainability mindset instilled in your organization, implementing your sustainability strategies becomes part of your standard operating procedure. Reviewing program performance, evaluating partnerships and other relationships, reassessing any gaps in resources, documenting institutional knowledge, and making improvements all become everyday action items. In this way you can continually assess where you are against where you aspire to be.

Timing and Opportunity
The continual self-assessment will not only improve your operation it will make you better attuned to opportunities that arise and better prepared to take advantage of them when they do.

Results and Impact
As sustainability becomes a standard practice the benefits multiply. The more conscientious you are with documenting and metrics the more robust your ROI will be, and the greater your program’s impact on your business partners and your participants.

DETERMINING WHAT TO SUSTAIN
Program Components
Just as important as the process of sustainability is determining what to sustain. Some program components may be more valuable than you anticipated. Others may not be worth continuing. Yet others may be affected, either negatively or positively, by outside forces. This is where your metrics come into use, giving you hard data as to what works and what doesn’t, what is of value to your stakeholders and what they find less useful.

Systems
As your program advances you may also find that some of your management and/or operational systems need adjustments or enhancements. Understanding this and being flexible to make modifications will strengthen the sustainability of your program. It is also important to know whether your existing systems can support the expansion your program is experiencing or hopes to experience.

Relationships
Sustaining relationships is an important aspect of sustaining the program itself. They also require monitoring and evaluating. Assessing the value, effectiveness, and strength of various partnerships keeps your sustainability on track. Meanwhile, work at solidifying existing relationships and cultivating new ones.
PARTNERSHIPS IN SUSTAINABILITY

Employment Partners
On-going communication and constructive feedback are the foundation of solid employer partnerships. Clarify roles and responsibilities, even if you presume them to be a given, and modify them as needed. Bring employers into the process by inviting them to join advisory councils and boards. This can reinforce partnerships and bring fresh perspectives to your program.

Training Providers and Intermediaries
Programs must also keep in mind the training providers and intermediaries they work with to ensure effective collaboration in creating and modifying curricula for program participants.

Community Organizations
To retain strong connections with schools, workforce development agencies, Chambers of Commerce, and other organizational partners, be sure to demonstrate “What’s in it for me” (WIFM). They have their own agendas and need to understand what they will gain from working with you. Again, the measuring and documentation you do will be invaluable in demonstrating this. Share supporting data as appropriate and use your success stories in your direct outreach as well as in any available media outlets.

GRANTEE PRESENTATION
CareerWise Colorado
Hollis Salway, Senior Director of Development and Research

The CareerWise Model
Mr. Salway described the CareerWise approach to sustainability as one that has achieved sustainability through value. He explained the CareerWise model – based in high schools, job sites and training centers – and its impact on the youth apprentices it serves and its business partners. He also illustrated the positive ROI projection for companies using apprentices, based on the 2016 case Western study, *The Benefits and Costs of Apprenticeships: A Business Perspective*. The CareerWise program developed its financial growth model by working with consultants to consider the variables built into the work and forecast for growth over time.

Sustainability – A Founding Principle
Sustainability was a founding principle for CareerWise. The proven ROI drew the program forward into execution. Over time roles were defined for distinct revenue streams. Collection of feedback then led to improvements.

Funding Evolves on the Road to Sustainability
**Philanthropy:** This can bridge the gap between startup and sustainability, mitigating risk for employers as well as participants. Later, it can support research and development as well as interventions that defy market forces.

**Government:** Public funding can support intermediary capacity and/or building infrastructure such as processes and curricula. Federal funding can support scaling, wraparound supports, and incentives.

**Earned Income:** Value provided by the intermediary can be quantified and leveraged to reduce the need for philanthropy over time. As an example, CareerWise leverages its expertise to realize consulting revenue for new communities launching youth apprenticeships.

**Ecosystem Contributions:** Business investment in wages and training costs can quickly outpace philanthropic and government funding at scale. As the capacity of school-based partners for advising, recruitment, and integration of work based learning (WBL) for credit increases, the need for the intermediary to cover those costs decreases.
Charleston Regional Youth Apprenticeships at Trident Technical College

Melissa Stowasser, Assistant Vice President of Community Partnerships

The Charleston Regional Youth Apprenticeship Model
Created through a regional, collaborative community partnership, this program was started to address the critical workforce needs within the region through customized apprenticeship programs and mentor the next generation of skilled workers for the Lowcountry. The model combines job-related education with on-the-job training and a scalable wage.

Apprenticeship Achievements
Program participants gain a high school diploma, a certificate from Trident Technical College (TTC), a national credential from the U.S. Department of Labor and two years paid work experience.

Exponential Growth
The sustainability success of Charleston Regional can be seen in the tremendous growth of its programs. From 2014 to 2021 it has expanded in its annual cohorts from a single career pathway to 18; from six companies to more than 180; and from 13 apprentices to more than 100. To date it has served 351 apprentices in its first seven cohorts.

Industry Sectors
It now places apprentices in nine different industrial sectors: HVAC, Manufacturing, Automotive Services, Engineering Services, Information Technology, Hospitality and Culinary Arts, Law Enforcement, Business, and Health. Apprentice occupations range from machinist to cybersecurity and from accounting to pharmacy technician.

The examples of these two grantees demonstrate both the necessity and enormous benefit of making sustainability an integral part of apprenticeship program planning and execution. They also illustrate how sustainability plans and implementation are unique to each grantees – their locale, their circumstances, and their participants.