Reform Support Network

Sustainability Self-Assessment Workbook for Local Educational Agencies
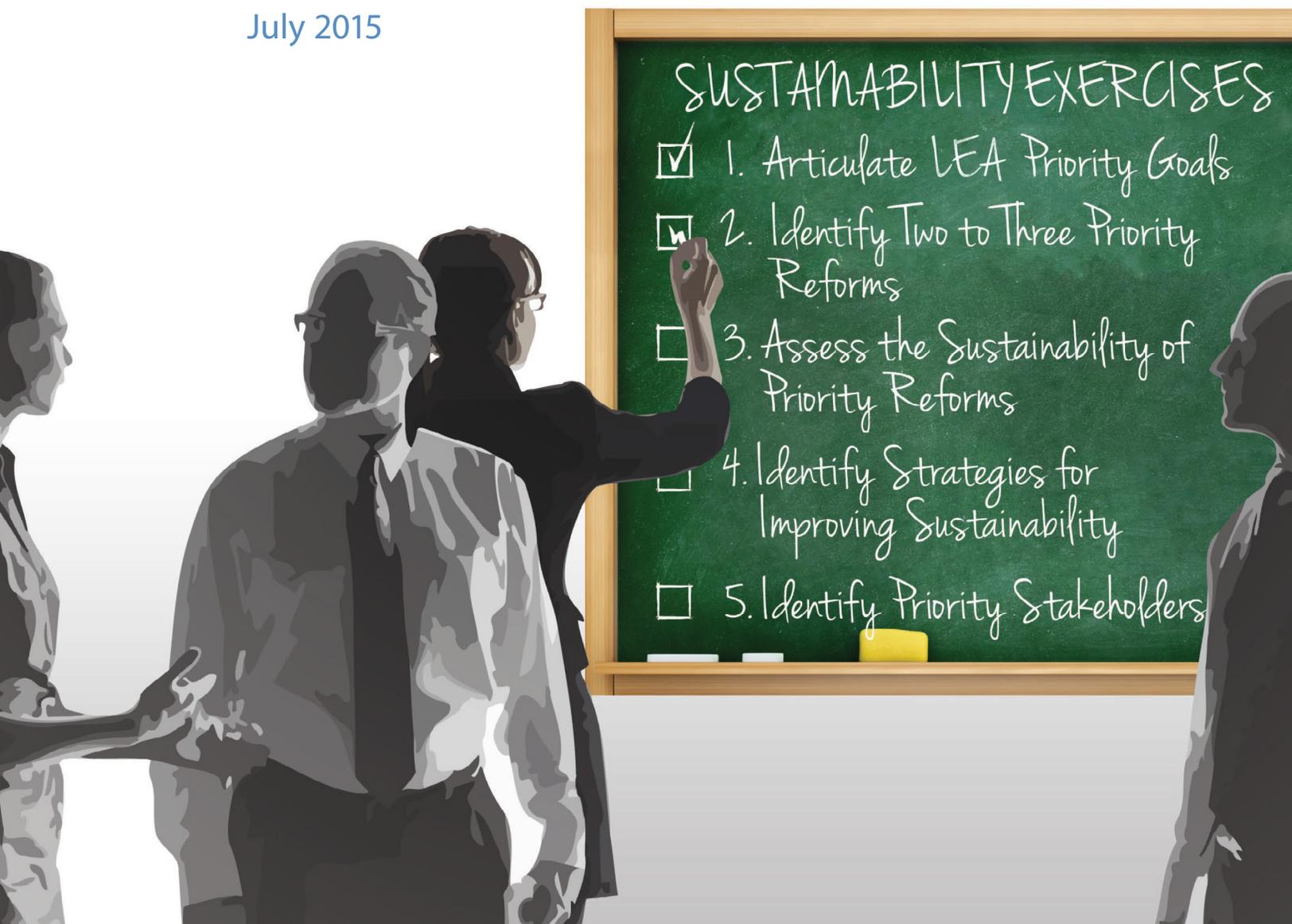
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SUSTAINABILITY EXERCISES
- ☑ 1. Articulate LEA Priority Goals
- ☑ 2. Identify Two to Three Priority Reforms
- ☐ 3. Assess the Sustainability of Priority Reforms
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Introduction

Purpose

This companion document to the Sustainability Rubric for Local Education Agencies contains a series of exercises designed to answer the question, "I want to make our reforms sustainable—where do I start?"

The workbook is designed to help a designated facilitator lead a series of meetings for the appropriate team in a local educational agency (LEA), conduct an initial self-assessment of the sustainability of the LEA's reforms and plan to improve sustainability. Before using the workbook, it is a good idea to read the Sustainability Rubric for Local Education Agencies to understand the structure of the framework and begin to consider its implications for your work.

Roles and Responsibilities

Facilitator: The facilitator should hold a leadership position within the LEA. The facilitator will be responsible for preparing and facilitating the self-assessment exercises. The facilitator will be responsible for reflecting on the outputs of the exercises and ensuring follow-up on findings. A facilitator needs 15 to 20 hours to complete the exercises.

LEA team: Members of the LEA team should include the Superintendent (a minimum of one hour) and leaders of the LEA's top reform efforts. The team should also include LEA leaders with responsibility for such areas as budgeting, finance and human resources. The major task of LEA team members is to participate in the self-assessment process. After the self-assessment is completed, LEA team members will become leaders in developing (or refining) and implementing the LEA's sustainability plan. At a minimum, the Superintendent should be consulted and give input on critical decisions during the self-assessment process and beyond.

Self-Assessment Exercises

The workbook contains five exercises meant to help your team assess and advance the sustainability of a specific priority reform—a body of work that an LEA undertakes to achieve two or more priority goals for student outcomes—and to hone in on aspects of sustainability to focus on.

The description of each exercise includes facilitator notes that provide recommendations for completing each exercise and templates that can be used in facilitation. The templates, however, are not the exercises; they are merely optional guides.

Use this workbook to drive the assessment process, unless your LEA has its own system for self-assessment. Focus on attaining the objectives of these five exercises; the exercise descriptions and the templates that accompany them are merely one way to reach those objectives.

Exercise Facilitator Notes

Time: *[Suggest the amount of time needed to complete each exercise.]*

Team: *[Provide recommendations on who to engage in each exercise.]*

Notes:

- *[Suggest activities and discussion questions for getting the most out of each exercise.]*

	Exercises (sequential)	Objectives
Assess Sustainability	1: Articulate LEA priority goals.	Identify or reaffirm the **priority goals** for improving student achievement.
	2: Identify two to three priority reforms.	Identify the **priority reforms** that will be most critical to sustain in order to reach the priority goals.
	3: Assess the sustainability of priority reforms.	Use the Sustainability Rubric to reflect on the sustainability of priority reforms.
Planning Tools	4: Identify strategies for improving sustainability.	Consider the plan for your priority reforms.
	5: Identify priority stakeholders.	Consider the people who will need to be involved in order for you to achieve your intended objectives and outcomes.

Exercises

Exercise 1: Articulate LEA Priority Goals

Student achievement goals are the ultimate aim of any effort to improve sustainability. Many LEAs have already defined these goals; this exercise is about agreeing on a smaller subset of priority goals (or, if necessary, articulating these priority goals for the first time).

Objective: Identify or reaffirm the LEA's priority goals for improving student achievement.

Instructions:

- Brainstorm all of the LEA's potential goals for student achievement. Consider the usual sources: board of education and/or LEA strategic plans, goals of local governmental leaders, and commitments to goals set by the State or Federal government, including requirements of the State's accountability system. Also consider patterns in student data that indicate performance challenges.

- Discuss and prioritize three to five goals that you consider to be most critical to realizing and maintaining dramatic gains in student achievement (for example, improving third-grade reading proficiency). Consider which goals should be driving the LEA's day-to-day work. Fill in your highest priority goals on the left column of Table 1.

- For each goal, fill in the right column of Table 1 by documenting the current evidence of progress (or lack thereof) towards the goal. What was the baseline date and level of performance when the goal was set? Where are we now? At this rate, are we on track to reach the goal?

Table 1. Articulating LEA Goals

Description of Goal *(What is the goal? Why does it matter? What is its origin?)*	Progress Toward Goal Thus Far *(data documenting progress)*

Exercise 2: Identify Two to Three Priority Reforms

A **priority reform** is a body of work that an LEA undertakes to achieve one or more of the priority goals identified in Exercise 1 (such as implementing college- and career-ready standards and assessments, implementing new educator evaluation systems or the integration of all three). This exercise serves two purposes: (1) It establishes which reforms leaders will focus on to improve sustainability; and (2) it helps teams consider and reaffirm what those reforms entail.

Objective: Identify the priority reforms that will be most critical to sustain in order to reach the LEA's priority goals.

Instructions:

- For a given goal identified in Table 1, brainstorm the reforms underway that are central to the LEA attaining that goal. Record them on sticky notes or cards.

- For each of the reforms identified, place them on a 2 by 2 inch matrix like the one in Table 2, based on where they best fit in relationship to other reforms.

  - What is the potential impact of each reform on the goal? Measure the impact in terms of the number of additional students affected (such as the number of additional students proficient, graduating or on track, as a result of the reform).

  - How difficult will it be to sustain that reform over time? (Consider resources required and political will, for example.)

If necessary, repeat the exercise with the remaining goals identified in Table 1. Based on where the reforms fall on the matrix, select two or three reforms as your team's top priorities.

Table 2. Identifying Priority Reforms

Potential Impact on Student Achievement Goals (Number of Additional Students)

High

Low

Level of Difficulty to Sustain Over Time

Low — High

Exercise 3: Assess the Sustainability of Priority Reforms

This exercise will ask you to use the Sustainability Rubric for Local Educational Agencies to assess the current sustainability of your selected reform.

Objective: Use the Sustainability Rubric for Local Educational Agencies to reflect on the sustainability of priority reforms.

Instructions:

- Read the introduction to the Sustainability Rubric for Local Educational Agencies and briefly discuss your reactions to its definitions and terms.

- With your selected priority reform in mind, review the first row of the rubric, including the guiding questions, the descriptors from left to right and the look-fors. Consider which descriptor (inadequate, emerging, strong or exemplary) *best* describes the current situation in your LEA.

- Indicate your vote to the rest of the group, perhaps using dot stickers on a flipchart with Table 3 or digital voting.

- Discuss your votes and the evidence for them; record comments in the Rationale/Evidence section of Table 3.

- Reach consensus on the LEA's current rating (inadequate, emerging, strong or exemplary) and record that in the Rubric Rating section in Table 3.

- Repeat this process with the remaining rows in the Context section, then the Capacity section, and finally the Performance Management section.

- When you have completed the full rubric, reflect on the complete picture and consider whether your ratings still make sense when compared with one another. Make changes as necessary. If you have not already done so, indicate your level of interest in receiving expert support on each element.

Exercise #3
Facilitator Notes

Time: 4-6 hours (split into two sessions)

Team: Facilitator and team

Notes:

- Have people complete this exercise as a team.

- Tell the team that this exercise takes a significant amount of time. Consider asking team members to read the rubric and prepare their votes and rationales in advance.

- Use comparisons to guide your discussions of the team's votes. For example:

  · Ask the highest voters why they voted the way they did; then ask the lowest voters to provide a counterpoint (or vice versa).

  · For a group that is less forthcoming, start with the voters who chose the category that got the most votes.

  · Urge the group to justify their votes through comparison. Ask someone who gave a "strong" rating: "What is keeping it from being exemplary?" Or ask a person who gave an "emerging" rating: "What keeps it from being inadequate?"

  · Periodically compare votes across rows of the rubric using the record compiled in Table 3. You might say, "This is the highest rating you have given yet. Are you really stronger in this area than in any other thus far?" Or suggest, "You are considering a strong rating, yet the evidence is similar for Row X and you only gave that an emerging rating. Which is it?"

- Urge the team to be honest and transparent about its ratings. This exercise is only useful if people are willing to celebrate areas of success and acknowledge areas where they fall short. Encourage a spread of ratings from inadequate to exemplary. If this does not happen, ask why.

- Work through the entire Sustainability Rubric for Local Educational Agencies for at least one of the priority reforms. The LEA team may discover elements and questions that it had not previously considered.

Optional Extension for Exercise 3: To assess the sustainability of additional priority reforms.

You may wish to conduct the self-assessment on more than one priority reform. Variations to consider include:

- Complete the full assessment (see instructions for Exercise 3).

- Use the **Sustainability Rubric Summary for Local Educational Agencies** to assess each element:
  - Refer to the **Sustainability Rubric Summary for Local Educational Agencies**.
  - Again, ask the team to reflect on the first element of the rubric. This time, consider whether this priority reform is stronger, weaker or about the same as the first priority reform. Reach consensus as a team and record your responses on Table 3.

- Throughout the discussion, continue to record the main points and evidence in the Rationale/Evidence section of Table 3.

- Repeat for the remaining elements of the rubric.

- Use the **Sustainability Rubric Summary for Local Educational Agencies** to quickly rate the priority reform on each element, and discuss ratings and evidence at the end, only in areas of disagreement.

- Use the **Sustainability Rubric Summary for Local Educational Agencies** for each team member to identify the three to five biggest elements of strength and weaknesses, discuss ratings and evidence and reach consensus.

- Use the **Sustainability Rubric Summary for Local Educational Agencies** to identify three to five elements of interest or concern and perform the full assessment (using the **regular rubric**) on them only.

Table 3. Applying the Rubric to the Priority Reforms

Priority Reform:				
	Variable	Element	Rubric Rating	Rationale/Evidence
1. Context for Sustaining Reform	A. Alignment of the Community-Wide System	i. Align the policy agenda and implementation with priority reforms	[For example, Exemplary]	
	B. Public Value	i. Build education stakeholder support for priority goals and reforms		
		ii. Build broad public support for priority goals and reforms		
2. System Capacity	A. LEA Capacity	i. Align human capital decisions with priority goals and reforms		
		ii. Build a culture of continuous improvement toward priority goals		
		iii. Align organizational structure with priority goals and reforms		
	B. Community Capacity	i. Extend capacity through partnerships		
		ii. Extend capacity in the field		
3. Performance Management	A. Clarity of Outcomes and Theory of Action	i. Set student outcome targets to achieve priority goals		
		ii. Establish a theory of action and strategies for implementing priority reforms		
		iii. Develop plans that align strategies with priority goals		
	B. Alignment of Resources	i. Direct resources to priority reforms		
		ii. Establish clear leadership of priority goals and reforms		
	C. Collection and Use of Data	i. Ensure quality data on performance		
		ii. Ensure quality data on implementation		
		iii. Use data to review progress and make mid-course corrections		
	D. Accountability for Results	i. Link internal accountability to results		
		ii. Link external accountability to results		
		iii. Engage stakeholders about results		

Exercise 4: Identify Strategies for Improving Sustainability

This exercise helps define the steps your team will take to improve sustainability of a given priority reform.

Objective: Define a strategy to improve the sustainability of a given priority reform.

Instructions to reflect on priority reforms identified:

- Refer to the self-assessment you completed in Exercise 3. Identify a variable or specific element that needs improvement.

- Brainstorm potential actions to move from weak to strong in this area.

Table 4. Plan to Improve Sustainability

Strategy to Improve Sustainability
Describe the strategy: What will change? Which variable or element is it intended to address? How will it help you move from weak to strong in this area?
Who is responsible for leading this strategy?
What are the major milestones for this strategy?
What resources are needed?
What are the risks that could derail this strategy, and what steps will you take to mitigate them?
How will you know that this strategy has been successful?

Exercise 5: Identify Priority Stakeholders

Who are the key stakeholders you will need to reach in order to achieve your objectives and desired outcome?
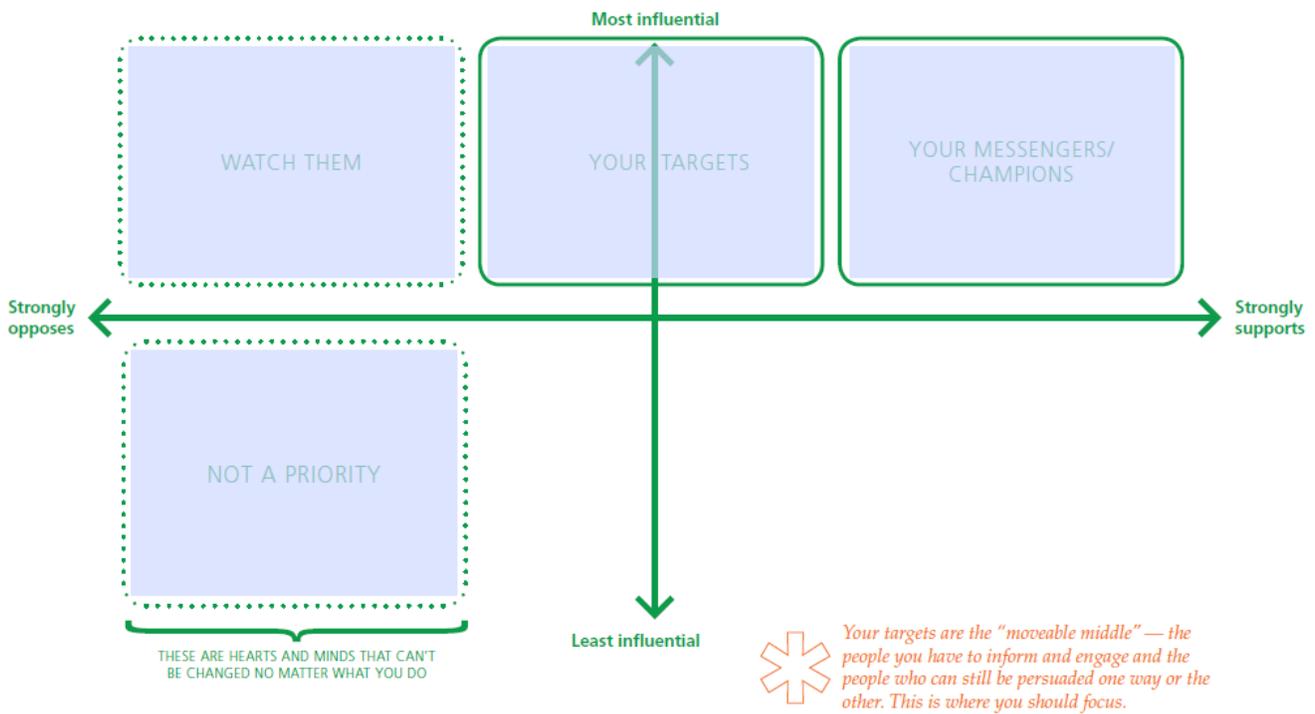
Objective: Identify and prioritize stakeholders you will need to reach in order to achieve your objectives.

Instructions:

- Brainstorm the stakeholders related to your priority goals and reforms. Record them on sticky notes or cards.
- Plot the stakeholders on the influence map below.
  - How influential is this stakeholder or stakeholder group?
  - How supportive or not supportive of your priority reforms is the stakeholder at this time?

Consider who on your influence map falls in the "moveable middle"—the people you have to inform and engage and the people who can still be persuaded one way or another. How will you engage those people to help them become more supportive? What are your objectives in engaging each stakeholder group? What is it you hope they will do? This exercise is excerpted from a longer workbook, prepared by the Reform Support Network and adapted from a tool created for Council of Chief State School Officers and PIE Network.

Plot each key player on the influence map.

WATCH THEM

YOUR TARGETS

YOUR MESSENGERS/ CHAMPIONS

NOT A PRIORITY

Most influential

Strongly opposes

Strongly supports

Least influential

THESE ARE HEARTS AND MINDS THAT CAN'T BE CHANGED NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO

Your targets are the "moveable middle" — the people you have to inform and engage and the people who can still be persuaded one way or the other. This is where you should focus.