

Sustainability Self-Assessment Workbook

June 2015



SUSTAINABILITY EXERCISES

- 1. Articulate State Priority Goals
- 2. Identify Two to Three Priority Reforms
- 3. Assess the Sustainability of Priority Reforms
- 4. Identify Strategies for Improving Sustainability
- 5. Identify Priority Stakeholders

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Exercises.....	4
Exercise 1. Articulate State Priority Goals.....	4
Exercise 2. Identify Two to Three Priority Reforms.....	5
Exercise 3. Assess the Sustainability of Priority Reforms.....	7
Exercise 4. Identify Strategies for Improving Sustainability.....	10
Exercise 5. Identify Priority Stakeholders.....	11

The Reform Support Network, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, supports the Race to the Top grantees as they implement reforms in education policy and practice, learn from each other, and build their capacity to sustain these reforms, while sharing these promising practices and lessons learned with other States attempting to implement similarly bold education reform initiatives.

Introduction

Purpose

This companion document to the **Sustainability Rubric** 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 State Education Agency (SEA), conduct an initial self-assessment of the sustainability of the State’s reforms and plan to improve sustainability. Before using the workbook, it is a good idea to read the **Sustainability Rubric** 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 SEA. 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.

State team: Members of the State team should include the State chief (a minimum of one hour) and leaders of the State’s top reform efforts. The team should also include SEA leaders with responsibility for such areas as budgeting, finance and human resources. The major task of State team members is to participate in the self-assessment process. After the convening, State team members will become leaders in developing (or refining) and implementing the State’s sustainability plan. At a minimum, the chief 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 SEA 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 State has its own system for self-assessment. The objectives of these five exercises are the real requirement; the exercises 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 State 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 State Priority Goals

Student achievement goals are the ultimate aim of any effort to improve sustainability. Many States 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 State’s priority goals for improving student achievement.

Instructions:

- Brainstorm all of the State’s potential goals for student achievement. Consider the usual sources: State board of education and/or SEA strategic plans, gubernatorial or legislative goals, Race to the Top and other Federal commitments. 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 SEA’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?

**Exercise #1
Facilitator Notes**

Time: 60 minutes

Team: Facilitator and team

Notes:

- Use the table to ensure that members of your State team have a shared understanding of the goals selected. If they have committed to more than three goals, guide team members to prioritize a few.
- Be sure to list resources that detail the goals or document the State’s progress toward them.
- Urge the team to consider the origin of each goal (such as Race to the Top, State, or SEA) and whether broad support exists for attaining the goal.
- The team may want to keep every goal the State is formally committed to. Encourage it to prioritize a few, even including Federal commitments.

Table 1. Articulating State Goals

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

Exercise 2: Identify Two to Three Priority Reforms

A **priority reform** is a body of work that an SEA undertakes to achieve one or more of the priority goals identified in Exercise 1 (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 State leaders will focus on to improve sustainability; and (2) it helps State 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 State's priority goals.

Instructions:

- For a given goal identified in Table 1, brainstorm the reforms underway that are central to the State 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.

Exercise #2 Facilitator Notes

Time: 1.5–2 hours

Team: Facilitator and team

Notes:

- Gauge the group's energy level. Then have the group brainstorm reforms and post the cards yourself, or have each team member brainstorm reforms and post them on the wall, combine ideas with others, eliminate duplicates and discuss. The second option encourages equal participation by everyone.
- The group members will likely brainstorm "reforms" at different levels (for example, "Implement college- and career-ready standards" as opposed to "Webinar series for regional leaders on the instructional shifts"). Urge the group to consider priority reforms as a **body** of work rather than individual actions. For example, implementing college and career-ready standards is a priority reform that might include several activities, such as professional development or instructional materials.
- You can put the reforms from each goal on one matrix (Table 2) as there may be some overlap. Using different colors for each goal may help. However, if the reforms get crowded, consider creating a matrix for each goal.
- Encourage participants to create a spread when placing the reforms on the matrix. If all reforms are deemed high impact and difficult to sustain, urge the team to think about which reforms have a higher or lower impact than others.
- When choosing priority reforms, consider the matrix as a discussion guide, but there are no hard rules about which reforms to prioritize (for example, they do not all have to come from one quadrant).
- Be sure that your State's chief has weighed in on the results of these first two exercises before moving on.

Table 2. Identifying Priority Reforms

High	
Low	
Potential Impact on Student Achievement Goals (Number of Additional Students)	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](#) to assess the current sustainability of your selected reform.

Objective: Use the Sustainability Rubric to reflect on the sustainability of priority reforms.

Instructions:

- Read the introduction to the [Sustainability Rubric](#) 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 descriptors (inadequate, emerging, strong or exemplary) *best* describes the current situation in your State.
- 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 State'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 at least one of the priority reforms. The State 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** to assess each element:
 - Refer to the **Sustainability Rubric Summary**.
 - 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** 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 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** 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 Statewide System	i. Align the policy agenda with priority reforms	[For example, Exemplary]	
	B. Public Value	i. Build stakeholder support for priority goals and reforms		
		ii. Build broad public support for priority goals and reforms		
2. System Capacity	A. SEA 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. State 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 plan(s) that aligns strategies with priority goals		
	B. Alignment of Resources	i. Direct resources (including funding) 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.

Exercise #4 Facilitator Notes

Time: 2 hours

Team: Facilitator and team

Notes:

- You can repeat this exercise for as many variables and elements as needed, but it is likely that you will need to prioritize among areas of weakness.
- While the table is a helpful planning tool, the success of the strategies you identify will be more likely if the strategies are tied to existing work streams and project management processes. Consider how to integrate the strategies into your work.

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?

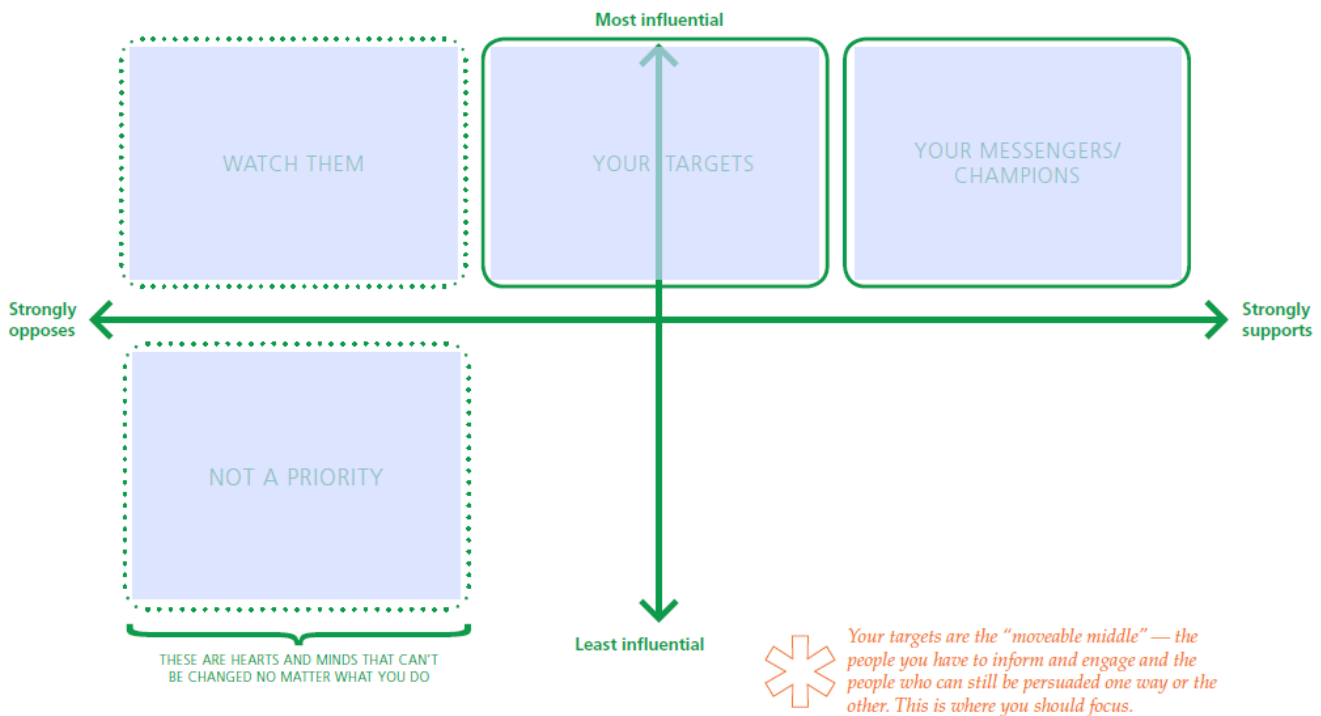
Objective: Identify and prioritize stakeholders you will need to reach in order to achieve your objectives.

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.



Exercise #5 Facilitator Notes

Time: 1 hour

Team: Facilitator and team

Notes:

- Similar to Exercise 2, encourage participants to create a spread when placing the stakeholders on the map. Differentiation is the goal of the exercise.
- Push the team to establish next steps for addressing the “moveable middle.”

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