

7 ~ 9 Months

Program Development & Management



The three program areas—Community and Site Partnerships, Member Development and Support, and Financial and Grants Management—discussed throughout the Guide are continued during this time phase. In each area, you will focus your time and effort on implementing and following through on activities started at the beginning of your program. Therefore, this section of the Guide is intentionally short.

This program phase emphasizes the activities around performance measurement, continuous improvement, and communication with stakeholders. How have we done? What else needs to be done? What can be done better? The idea is to continue doing many of the program development and support tasks you started months before, only now you want to reflect on how to do them even better. As you move through these middle months, you will be able to identify your program's good practices and use them to help you shape your ideas for the next program year.

At the end of this section, you will be able to

- Identify components of your program where improvements can be made using a continuous improvement tool.
- Identify ways to sustain your program over time with or without AmeriCorps funding.
- Access and use a variety of tools and electronic resources to complete all activities in the Tools for Success section.

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Continuous Improvement

What does Continuous Improvement mean?

Continuous improvement is about finding better ways to do things. You will essentially scrutinize all components of the program in search of opportunities for improvement. This process will ultimately lead to more satisfied customers and better results.

Why is continuous improvement important?

If you create an organizational culture focused on continuous improvement, long-term sustainability can be assured. Continuous improvement involves understanding stakeholders' expectations and meeting those with a well-run program. It also means taking real action to improve upon gaps in practices or functions. The health of an organization and its staff really depends on a culture of making things better.

How do you do it?

✓	Review the Principles of Continuous Improvement from the Corporation's <i>Handbook for Continuous Improvement</i> .
✓	Create a climate within the organization that values constructive criticism and approaches problems as opportunities to grow and learn.
✓	Engage staff in identifying ways to improve practices.
✓	Use data collection tools discussed earlier to substantively improve your program functions.
✓	Where possible, involve stakeholders as key resources to assist in improving processes.

Resources

Resource	Description	Contact
National Service Resource Center	Contains descriptions of tools and practices that service and other organizations use to continuously improve their ability to accomplish results.	www.nationalserviceresources.org/

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Program Sustainability

What does program sustainability mean?

Sustainability means that a program is able to “stay alive” and be kept viable for an extended period of time even with reduced, or in the absence of, AmeriCorps funding. Sustainability relates directly to the organization’s ability to develop funding resources it needs to maintain the current services and operations, and plan for the future. It usually includes efforts to increase the public’s awareness of your activities and services.

Why is program sustainability so important?

If your organization and AmeriCorps program are serving the community well, then the community probably wants you around for many more years to come. However, sustainability can be a difficult status to achieve. Many nonprofit organizations need to be mindful of fluctuations in the general economy, the additional resources (personnel, space, equipment, etc.) required for program expansion, the degree of public awareness about the program, the ratio of paid staff to volunteers, the potential for safely expanding the volunteer staff, and other issues. Suffice it to say, there are many factors that can positively or negatively impact program sustainability.

How do you do it?

✓	Commit to on-going evaluation mechanisms for staff, service site partners, AmeriCorps members, community members, and other key stakeholders.
✓	Use performance measurement data to identify gaps that might detract from your program’s potential to be sustainable over time. Work to close those gaps.
✓	Identify the impact on the community and stakeholders if your program were removed. Use this to inform planning outreach and strategic partnership building.
✓	Look at the long-range plans for your organization. Identify possible budgetary and/or staffing shortfalls in the areas of fundraising, public awareness, performance measures, cross-sector partnerships, and volunteers or interns.
✓	Continue collaborating with service site partners and others to enhance the impact of the AmeriCorps program services.
✓	Engage board members in identifying and cultivating resources to sustain the program over the long-term.

Resource

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TOOLS
for
SUCCESS



Principles of Continuous Improvement

1. Our “customers” are the reason we exist. We must stay attuned to their needs and strive always to exceed their expectations.
2. Volunteers, participants and staff are customers too. They must be motivated, trained, and satisfied if they are to serve our customers well.
3. It is not enough to talk about customer satisfaction. We must set measurable goals, communicate them throughout our organization, regularly and systematically gauge our progress against these goals, and take action to continuously improve their performance.
4. Anytime we learn we are falling short, we have an opportunity to improve. Anytime we learn we are meeting or exceeding targets, we have an opportunity to set higher targets.
5. Continuous improvement is the responsibility of everyone in our organization.
6. Effective communication within our organization is essential to continuous improvement. To help improve the organization, staff must understand what customers’ value and how well customers’ think the program is doing.
7. Constructive criticism is a positive step toward a solution, not a negative spotlight on a mistake. We learn from our failures as well as from our successes.
8. Creating energized, empowered teams is the best catalyst for improving an organization. Motivated teams can produce extraordinary results—results that exceed those achieved by individuals or less cohesive groups.