Framework for Sustaining Promising Investments

In education and human services, initiatives can be as short- or long-lived as the resources backing them – people, time, and money. Savvy leaders are strategic about making sure that programs that are working for children and families survive downturns in funding, staffing or leadership changes, and temporary shifts in priorities.

Money matters…
Sustainability involves balancing financial needs with funding strategies.

Consider one-time and on-going costs, costs for services and infrastructure, and how costs will change as the initiative matures.

While long-term funding is ideal, shorter-term funds can help with one-time investments, capacity building, or as a bridge to longer-term funding.

but it's only one part of the sustainability story
Funding fuels the work. But more than money is needed to sustain it over time. Here are some other features of a successful initiative that will help you make sure you are setting yourself up for long-term success:

Results
Strong positive results are critical to long-term sustainability. Data systems allow initiatives to:
• Collect information on access, participation, satisfaction and outcomes – and review data with an equity lens
• Think broadly and strategically about the kind of results they can hold themselves accountable for and communicate their successes far and wide
• Understand what’s working and for which populations, and identify changes to achieve better results

Organizational Capacity
To sustain initiatives, organizations need:
• Dedicated staff
• Goals aligned with the larger organization or community
• Solid communications plans
• Strong back office and fiscal systems
• To be equity and improvement driven

Leaders
Leaders can use their positional authority to channel existing resources to an initiative and open doors to additional sources. Make sure your district, school, and community leaders:
• Understand the initiative’s value
• See it as a key factor in helping to address local goals and priorities

Stakeholders
Stakeholders can be your most effective allies. Make sure that families, teachers, students, and community members:
• Know and love your initiative
• Can communicate its value
• Are engaged in planning and documenting results