



Developing a Sustainability Plan for Weed and Seed Sites



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Introduction

The mission of the Community Capacity Development Office (CCDO) is to enable and facilitate local efforts to break the cycle between persistent crime conditions and community deterioration. CCDO's support is intended to stimulate synergistic relationships among community agencies, businesses, and residents to improve the safety, housing, economic, and social environment in designated geographic areas. Given that these circumstances are generally the result of long-term and widespread conditions, meaningful solutions will require efforts that are equally longstanding and multifaceted. Consequently, it is essential that local sites recognize the need to develop commitments and resources that extend beyond the time period that CCDO's funding is available.

This publication provides Weed and Seed sites with recommendations for developing and implementing a sustainability plan. Checklists and worksheets have been included to guide the site coordinator and Steering Committee in developing this plan. Ideally, each site should develop a sustainability plan within the first 2 years of becoming a designated Weed and Seed site. Steering Committees for sites that are nearing the end of their Weed and Seed designation but have not developed a plan can use this publication to consider what steps should be taken to successfully identify and integrate the resources needed to support the long-term strategy for the community.

The Significance of the Weed and Seed Designation

Since the inception of Operation Weed and Seed in 1991, CCDO has designated more than 300 communities as Weed and Seed sites. Annually, hundreds of communities throughout the country pursue the Weed and Seed designation by submitting an Official Recognition (OR) application that includes a comprehensive strategy for addressing crime and community revitalization efforts. Concentrating on communities experiencing high levels of crime, CCDO limits the Weed and Seed designation to 5 calendar years.

Weed and Seed brings together diverse representatives from local government, community service providers, and residents to form a Steering Committee. This committee guides the development and implementation of a comprehensive strategy that outlines activities designed to address crime, the socioeconomic challenges affecting residents, and the physical deterioration of homes and other buildings in the community.

CCDO requires certain partners to serve on the Steering Committee throughout the duration of the Weed and Seed designation. These required partners include the U.S. Attorney's Office (USAO), residents, local law enforcement, and local government. In addition to the required partners, the Steering Committee typically includes community service providers, private-sector businesses, schools, health agencies, and faith-based organizations. The committee is responsible for monitoring implementation of the strategy *and* the sustainability plan. A full list of other recommended partners can be found in the *Official Recognition Guidelines* or the *Weed and Seed Implementation Manual*.

In developing an OR application, each site formulates a comprehensive strategy with goals and objectives divided into four components:

- Law Enforcement
- Community Policing

- Prevention, Intervention, and Treatment
- Neighborhood Restoration

Subcommittees support the Steering Committee and serve as the vehicles for implementing the tasks and activities outlined in the strategy. Sites may have as few as two or several subcommittees, depending on the desired expansion of their operating structure. All sites must also operate with a site coordinator who serves as staff to the Steering Committee and works to guide the partners in implementing activities that support the strategy. Technical assistance is available to help enhance the leadership capacity of the overall structure by clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the Steering Committee, site coordinator, fiscal agent, and subcommittees.

To help support efforts to sustain Weed and Seed activities after the designation and funding end, CCDO modified the *OR Guidelines* in 2003 to require sites to include sustainability strategies in the OR application. CCDO recognizes that no single sustainability plan addresses the needs of all Weed and Seed sites. The uniqueness of each community demands a sustainability plan customized to fit the requirements of the site. True sustainability strategies extend beyond traditional financial resources and represent the continuation of the activities that achieve performance indicators and promote positive changes in the quality of life for residents in the community.

Weed and Seed Is a “Strategy”

Weed and Seed represents a collaborative model that helps bridge the gap between residents and other community stakeholders, assisting them to collectively solve problems and work to improve the quality of life for residents. Each Weed and Seed site has full access to a range of tools, tactics, and training to strengthen the skills of community leaders while focusing on the implementation of a customized community strategy. The expression, “Weed and Seed is a *strategy* and not a program” is stressed at every Weed and Seed conference and training event. This emphasis is intended to encourage sites to focus on achieving the goals and objectives incorporated in the community’s strategy. Many sites—guided by a unified community vision—successfully work to implement these strategies by leveraging a community’s resources and addressing its unmet needs.

Weed and Seed sites may receive up to 5 years of funding from CCDO. As with most government grant programs, CCDO cannot fund every Weed and Seed site indefinitely. Unfortunately, collaborative models such as Weed and Seed take time—particularly as the foundation for Weed and Seed begins with bringing together individuals and organizations who may never have worked together before. Because the selection process for the Weed and Seed Official Recognition prioritizes communities experiencing high levels of crime and severe economic deterioration, it is unrealistic to expect that every aspect of the community will be transformed within the 5-year period. Weed and Seed funding provides communities with capacity-building support based on a uniform operating structure and plans to implement aspects of the comprehensive strategy. Recognizing community revitalization requires substantial and ongoing local commitment. Each site must adopt a long-term view for achieving planned goals—a view that may extend beyond the 5-year funding period for Weed and Seed.

During *and* beyond the 5-year Weed and Seed timeframe, sites should identify additional resources that can support implementation of the comprehensive strategy. This process begins with the required memorandums of agreements (MOAs), which outline the resource commitments each partner agrees to contribute toward implementation of the strategy. Resources often include financial support, donated volunteer and staff time, and the use of facilities and equipment. The collective and ongoing contribution of such resources helps sites maintain an extended commitment to community change instead of narrowly focusing on the distribution of the Weed and Seed funds in the form of sub-grants. Weed and Seed funding symbolizes more than a grant allocation: It represents new resources that can be leveraged to develop or expand the community's strategy to achieve positive outcomes.

Unfortunately, collaborations can be quickly derailed by the loss of a major funding source. Sites graduating from Weed and Seed without a sustainability plan have experienced some or all of the following challenges:

- Loss of activities in the sites within all four components.
- Gradual breakdown of the Steering Committee.
- Loss of clarity, vision, and continued purpose.
- New service gaps, which accompany lost programs or capacity from local agencies and organizations.
- Loss of site staff who can facilitate communications across partners and provide essential site management and coordination services.

Preparing a sustainability plan early in the Weed and Seed designation period helps keep the Steering Committee focused on the strategy's goals and objectives, while working to identify new resources to support the strategy beyond the designation. The sustainability plan extends beyond simply seeking funding to replace Weed and Seed; instead, the plan identifies the action steps needed to sustain successful activities in the community that address the gaps and unmet needs outlined in the comprehensive strategy.

Preparing To Plan

Sustaining a site's Weed and Seed strategy begins by first recognizing that, as a *strategy*, the focal point should remain on continuing or expanding the programs, services, or special initiatives led by the many partnering organizations that serve on the Steering Committee and subcommittees. The sustainability plan connects the ongoing activities to the different resources required to support the strategy above and beyond Weed and Seed funding. In most Weed and Seed sites, a host of programs and services already exist in the broader community, ranging from education, health, employment, crime reduction, Neighborhood Watch, economic development, and treatment services. Particularly for municipalities involved in implementing the strategy, Weed and Seed funding often represents only a small fraction of the financial resources invested in the community. In addition, some Weed and Seed sites have identified other collaborative initiatives with similar missions that serve the same community. The strength and feasibility of the sustainability plan is tied directly to the active expansion of partners working to support the community strategy.

Who Develops the Sustainability Plan?

The development of a sustainability plan requires involvement from Steering Committee members—the site coordinator as well as subcommittee members. The Steering Committee serves as the lead entity in developing the sustainability plan, in addition to monitoring implementation of the strategy. Although a special subcommittee can be established to oversee development of a sustainability plan, it is important that the planning process and, ultimately, the execution remain front and center with the Steering Committee. The site coordinator plays a decisive role in supporting and guiding the planning process. He or she may need to serve as the overall facilitator of the planning sessions as well as work to maintain continuity between the priorities identified in the community's strategy and the sustainability plan.

What Does the Planning Process Entail?

Sustainability planning goes beyond the initial development of a comprehensive strategy.

It must identify the diverse resource requirements needed to continue key activities in the community.

The planning process helps the Steering Committee to examine successes and disappointments through a lens of “what should be sustained in the community.” Keep in mind that each site will implement activities designed to achieve the stated goals and objectives.

Although some efforts can be highly visible, they may not represent achievement of the strategy’s goals. Steering Committees that are committed to developing a sustainability plan must be prepared at a minimum to—

- Conduct a critical examination of their role and contributions as a collective body in leading the implementation of the strategy.
- Examine the individual contributions of members and the site coordinator in furthering the goal and objectives outlined in the strategy.

- Assess the progress achieved in each of the four components compared with the original community vision.
- Support ongoing communication with community residents and other stakeholders to promote the accomplishments of the strategy and plans beyond the Weed and Seed designation.
- Evaluate the initial priorities based on community needs/opportunities to determine if modifications are required.

Just as a local strategy must evolve to remain responsive to changing conditions and emerging issues, the sustainability plan should be a living document that reflects the site’s strategic goals and resource opportunities. Some people dread planning processes because of previous bad planning experiences. A sustainability plan is an action plan that, once completed, must be followed immediately to obtain the desired results. The worksheets included in this guide provide some easy-to-use forms that represent the steps to be taken as part of an exciting and informative planning process.

Dimensions of Sustainability

Weed and Seed is a collaborative model that includes four distinct components working in tandem to achieve desired community outcomes. For the entire model to be successful, the structure consisting of the Steering Committee and subcommittees, the various programs and services available in the community, and the financial resources available to support the programs and services must all operate in a coordinated and mutually supportive manner.

CCDO has learned that sustainability planning extends beyond a single dimension for Weed and Seed sites. The concept of *sustainability dimensions* was first introduced in 2004 by Jim Zepp, Training and Technical Assistance Director for the Justice Research and Statistics Association. Mr. Zepp recognized that multiple dimensions of sustainability enabled sites to measure how the overall performance of their activities compared with the comprehensive strategy and established community priorities. Based on the assessment of performance using these dimensions, sites can develop action steps to address deficiencies in performance and identify the appropriate partners and resources to realize desired outcomes. The following presents a brief description of these dimensions and potential indicators for measuring a site's performance.

Structural Effort

Definition: The stability of participation and tenure by leadership, key organizations, and the maintenance of the commitment to the services/activities implemented in the Weed and Seed site.

Potential Indicators

- Length of participation in the strategy by individual agencies/organizations.

- Continued participation expressed through letters of support or MOAs.
- Consistent attendance by key leadership at Steering Committee and subcommittee meetings.
- Active participation by key organizations in local strategy implementation.
- Minimal/reasonable staff turnover.
- Establishment of MOAs or other formal relationships with strategic partners.
- Examination of alternative leadership structures to support Weed and Seed activities.
- Increased resident leadership capacity.

Community Impact

Definition: The coordinated delivery and evaluation of programs and services designed to address unmet needs of children, teens, or adults residing in the community.

Potential Indicators

- Number of participants enrolled in programs.
- Improvements in outcomes for individuals receiving services.
- Leveraging of additional resources to support the expansion of successful programs.
- Improved communication and referral systems among service providers.

Resource Development

Definition: Identifying and securing diverse and reliable resources to support the ongoing activities connected to Weed and Seed goals and objectives.

Potential Indicators

- Improved coordination among community partners in securing funding on behalf of programs and services in the Weed and Seed community.
- Increased levels of volunteerism supporting programs and services.
- Evidence of additional funding commitments for Weed and Seed staff and related activities.

The Weed and Seed model provides each site with a structure, tools, and access to technical assistance resources for implementing a comprehensive strategy that begins with a community vision supported by measurable goals and objectives. Given multiple dimensions of sustainability, Steering Committee members must evaluate the model's performance relative to each dimension to decide what programs, services, or special initiatives remain most important to retain and/or expand. For some sites, all of the dimensions must be sustained; for others, only some of them. All of the above dimensions require the Steering Committee to focus on achieving the community vision while encouraging community participation, expansion of the number of collaborative partners, coordination of key programs and services, and continuous leveraging of resources.

The next three chapters will provide a more comprehensive examination of the three dimensions of sustainability and provide tools to help strengthen deficiencies in these areas toward building a sustainability plan.

Structural Effort— Maintaining an Effective Operating Structure

The dimension of *structural effort* focuses on the operating structure leading the implementation of the Weed and Seed strategy. This dimension highlights the roles and impact of the Steering Committee, subcommittees, and site coordinator working together to perform the tasks associated with the strategy.

Weed and Seed represents a collaborative process that promotes communitywide participation through a Steering Committee structure. Often, new sites may find that members of the different committees are unclear about their roles and responsibilities. For many communities, the operation of the Steering Committee is a new experience. People come together to address common goals, yet may not know what to do. They may require assistance from CCDO, which can provide an orientation to members of the Steering Committee as well as any subcommittees to help everyone understand their individual roles and collective responsibilities.

CCDO encourages the development of the community collaboration by requiring Weed and Seed sites to secure signed memorandums of agreements (MOAs) from all participating organizations serving on the Steering Committee. The MOA symbolizes the commitment of these organizations to work together, along with community residents, to implement the strategy. The Steering Committee is responsible for enforcing all signed agreements.

In addition to the Steering Committee, various subcommittees may be established, which offer opportunities for other organizations and residents to learn and participate in Weed and Seed on another level. Often considered a capacity-building model, Weed and Seed helps foster the development of new resident leaders in the community. These individuals may ultimately assume greater responsibilities in promoting positive change as their Weed and Seed experiences broaden. Residents and other community stakeholders may serve on a subcommittee

consistent with their areas of interest before serving on the Steering Committee.

CCDO also requires each site to develop operating policies. These policies will further reinforce the responsibilities of the various subcommittees and the site coordinator. Developing carefully crafted operating policies helps clarify who can serve on the Steering Committee and defines the term limits and composition requirements as well as procedural concerns associated with managing the Weed and Seed funding.

An effective Weed and Seed Steering Committee requires—

- Continued commitment among members to a shared vision for the community.
- Ongoing communication among and between the Steering Committee and subcommittee members.
- Oversight of activities linked to all four components.
- Monitoring of performance measures and outcomes.
- Consistent commitment to identifying new resources within the community to support the strategy.

The site coordinator supports the work of the Steering Committee. This person serves as staff to the committee and is responsible for forging new partnerships with public- and private-sector stakeholders and identifying additional resource opportunities to support the strategy. The coordinator may have dual supervisors, including the Steering Committee and the fiscal agent. The site coordinator plays an important

role in monitoring the progress of programs and services offered in the community, exploring other programs and best practices in Weed and Seed sites throughout the country, and assisting with the development of a sustainability plan.

In the context of a sustainability plan, a common question often raised by Steering Committees pertains to whether the Weed and Seed operating structure should be retained after the Official Recognition expires. CCDO provides sites with a recommended operating structure to ensure that all aspects of community leadership are involved in the development and implementation of activities connected to the overall strategy. Sometimes similar structures may already exist in the community and can be modified to meet the composition requirements of the Steering Committee. The structural effort dimension of sustainability encourages sites to examine the effectiveness of the operating structure as a foundation for leading community change. The Steering Committee should assess the impact of the operating structure on an annual basis and make changes, if necessary, to enhance the committee's ability to lead the implementation of the strategy. Remember, CCDO encourages sites to diversify the composition of the Steering Committee to meet the needs of the community without eliminating any of the required partners. Weed and Seed sites have adopted different approaches in addressing the role of the operating structure and sustainability. A brief summary of these options, including their pros and cons, follows.

- The Weed and Seed strategy is incorporated into the city government's infrastructure and operates as a program led by the city.

Pros	Cons
Provides a steady stream of city funding to support the strategy.	Could represent a potential loss of power for members of the committee with all decisions controlled by the city.
Offers greater leverage in seeking funding for new ideas or programs.	May limit cooperation and involvement of community agencies and residents.

- The Weed and Seed Steering Committee establishes a separate nonprofit organization. Please note that turning a Weed and Seed site into a nonprofit *before* the Weed and Seed designation expires may jeopardize the USAO’s ability to serve as a required partner on the Steering Committee.

Pros	Cons
Allows the new organization to pursue a wide range of funding opportunities.	May result in a possible disconnect with local law enforcement agencies.
Continues to address gaps in the community infrastructure.	May cause unnecessary competition with community partners for local funding and the breakdown of the collaboration.
	Weed and Seed truly becomes viewed as a program and not a strategy.

- A membership consortium is created whose partners contribute annually to cover the cost of continuing the collaboration and supporting the position of site coordinator.

Pros	Cons
Enables Weed and Seed to continue functioning in a coordinating role.	Certain organizations may not perceive a benefit in paying a fee.
Provides a permanent mechanism for the collaboration to seek funding.	The consortium still may need to raise funds from other sources and compete with partnering agencies.

Before moving forward with any changes to the operating structure supporting Weed and Seed, the Steering Committee should conduct a self-assessment to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the current operating structure. Data collected from staff and Steering Committee members may yield critical insights to guide the Steering Committee in addressing the structural considerations of the sustainability plan. If the site is experiencing problems with the current structure, contact the CCDO Program Manager to obtain technical assistance to address these concerns.

For sites ready to assess the effectiveness of the Steering Committee, the following assessment tool (table 1) may be distributed to all Steering Committee members and staff. The tabulated results will yield some key facts about the Steering Committee that will ultimately impact the effectiveness of the sustainability plan.

Table 1. Assessing the Strengths and Weaknesses of the Steering Committee

Place a check ✓ in the box that matches your response to the following statements.

Factors	Too Early To Tell	Yes	No	Somewhat	Don't Know
Everyone shares and supports a common vision for community change.					
All partners work together to achieve the goals and objectives in the strategy.					
Everyone understands the strategy, and Steering Committee meetings focus on the progress achieved.					
The Steering Committee collects and analyzes data to evaluate activities within the four components.					
Area politicians at all levels of government support Weed and Seed.					
Diverse, identifiable resources support the Weed and Seed strategy.					
Individuals in the community champion and promote Weed and Seed among residents and other stakeholders.					
Agencies and organizations on the Steering Committee work cooperatively toward goals and objectives.					
The leadership is diverse and clearly understands the Weed and Seed philosophy.					
The leadership is committed to building the capacity of resident leaders to ensure active community participation.					
The boundaries of the Weed and Seed site and the strategy truly reflect the community and its assets.					
The Steering Committee communicates the vision, goals, objectives, and outcomes to the overall community on a regular basis.					

Additional Questions for Consideration

- Are there other organizations or constituencies that should be represented on the Steering Committee? If “yes,” what are they?
- Are there other organizations, officials, or community members that should be invited to participate in Steering Committee meetings? If “yes,” who are they?

Other Indicators

Attendance. The Steering Committee can use the following formula to determine its members’ attendance at meetings:

(sum of total number of members attending each meeting held in a year)/

(number of committee members × number of scheduled meetings per year)

× 100 = attendance

example: $150 / (20 \times 12) \times 100 = 62.5$

Tenure. Assess the average tenure of Steering Committee members.

Responses marked “No,” “Too Early To Tell,” or “Don’t Know” indicate areas that may inhibit long-term sustainability if not addressed before or within the context of the sustainability plan.

Although the previous assessment was designed to identify potential challenges with the operating structure, remember, each committee must bring different resources that support the overall strategy. An effective Steering Committee knows what each partner brings to the process and works to address voids that may be filled by other untapped partners in the community. The following grid (table 2) helps capture the actual contributions of each Steering Committee member. Even residents serving on the committee can address each component as volunteers. It’s a great way to hone in on sectors within the community that are not represented on the Steering Committee.

Table 2. Monitoring the Contributions of Steering Committee Members

How do Steering Committee members contribute to the implementation of the strategy?
 Fill in the grid with information on each Steering Committee member.

Steering Committee member	On which subcommittee does the Steering Committee member serve?	What sector does the member represent (housing, law enforcement, employment, youth programs)?	Who represents the agency at meetings? (Who actually attends the meetings?)	What does the member contribute to the objectives and tasks outlined in the strategy (funding, staff time, equipment, facilities)?
USAO	Law enforcement	Law enforcement	LECC	Space to house site coordinator
CDC	NR	Housing and economic development	Executive director	Space to house Safe Haven; administers home-buyer education program

Requirements for Achieving Sustainability

If the desired sustainability plan involves retaining the Steering Committee as the operating structure, the following guiding principals will help strengthen the leadership structure:

- **Maintain a clear vision.** A long-term vision spurs ideas that stimulate new partnerships, encourages local leadership capacity building, and promotes effective problem solving based on a community's assets.
- **Manage expectations.** Positive change in the community takes time and patience. Unfortunately, residents may have been disappointed by the end result of other government programs. Keep everyone in the community informed on the accomplishments achieved within the Weed and Seed strategy.
- **Focus on measurable outcomes.** Staying focused on achieving the community's vision means implementing activities that yield measurable outcomes. Sites should establish realistic baseline goals to measure performance. Don't be afraid to change direction in supporting new programs or services to obtain the desired outcome.
- **Broaden the community's leadership pool.** Continue building upon the community's social capital. Work to increase the leadership capacity of residents as these individuals will ultimately lead the community's future decisionmaking process.

- **Maintain effective communication at all levels.** Keep all stakeholders engaged in the implementation process to help promote the success of the strategy to current and potential resource providers.

Here are some tips to remember about the Weed and Seed operating structure:

- Steering Committees must include representatives from these four partners: residents, USAO, local law enforcement, and local government.
- Weed and Seed provides a comprehensive list of other agencies and organizations that also should be included on the Steering Committee, including—
 - Community- and faith-based organizations.
 - Schools.
 - Health organizations.
 - Parks and recreation centers.
 - Housing organizations.
 - Neighborhood associations.
 - Civic organizations.
 - Nonprofit organizations such as the Boys & Girls Clubs of America and Big Brothers Big Sisters.
 - Small businesses.
 - Financial institutions.
 - Employment assistance agencies.
 - Federal law enforcement agencies.

- Steering Committees must develop operating policies and procedures.
- Residents are defined as individuals who live in the community, but do not also represent an organization serving on the committee.
- Residents should select their own representatives and rotate on and off the Steering Committee.
- Steering Committees are responsible for monitoring the implementation of the strategy.
- Steering Committees should review the financial reports on a monthly basis.
- The site coordinator works for the Steering Committee, but is not a member.

Community Impact

The community impact dimension encourages examination of the services and activities that consistently support the community's priorities and achieve positive impact. A key advantage of the Weed and Seed designation is its cachet in leveraging additional resources for a site. Although local sites often begin implementing their strategies before receiving a Weed and Seed grant, funding from CCDO ultimately provides support for community organizations to expand their respective program capacities to serve more residents.

Although CCDO funding may help support different community programs connected to the strategy, there are usually other programs operating in the community that are also critical to the strategy but which do not require CCDO funding. An emphasis on implementation of the comprehensive strategy rather than the distribution of CCDO funds helps keep Weed and Seed sites focused on the big picture—positive community change—instead of the limited purpose of distributing subgrants. Instances in which participating agencies work together solely for the purposes of securing a subgrant often create an atmosphere void of trust and good communication and result in shallow, unproductive partnerships.

A diverse base of resources is critical to sustaining effective programs and activities beyond a single funding source. Diversity in resources may emerge through new collaborations with organizations operating outside the boundaries of the Weed and Seed site. Often organizations offering quality, evidence-based programs and services consistent with the priorities for the community exist, but they are not connected to the strategy. Before expending Weed and Seed funds to support the creation of similar programs, the Steering Committee should work to establish partnerships with existing organizations outside of the area and recruit these organizations to become involved in the delivery of their offerings to the community. The Weed and Seed site coordinators play an important role in helping to identify potential partners and making recommendations to the Steering Committee for new partners

to join the collaborative process. An organization may operate outside the boundaries of the Weed and Seed site, but that does not mean that it has no interest in serving the needs of the residents.

The community impact dimension requires sites to separate the agenda of individual organizations from the needs of the overall community. Effective community impact is measured by focusing on the positive changes for the individuals, families, and other community stakeholders. In developing collaborations such as Weed and Seed, participating organization leadership must consider the overall goals of the strategy and agree to forge partnerships that truly benefit the community. In forming these partnerships, community impact becomes the ultimate priority requiring every organization to examine what can be contributed to the process to achieve positive goals. For some agencies, this may involve donating office space; others may contribute staff time or equipment. Typically, Weed and Seed funds are used to bridge gaps in existing resources to expand the capacity to achieve greater community impact. In a competitive environment, programs with demonstrated success stand a better chance of receiving additional funding from public and private funding sources than unproven programs. Therefore, it may be wise to reexamine the range of programs or services currently operating under the auspices of the Weed and Seed strategy and invest resources on those programs or services that have consistently demonstrated quality and measurable outcomes.

Additionally, the Weed and Seed Steering Committee and staff should not be in the

business of actually running programs in the community. One of the quickest ways to derail a sustainability plan is to begin competing with other partners on the Steering Committee or community members for funding to run a program. A hands-off approach by the Steering Committee to running programs avoids positioning Weed and Seed as a program and not a comprehensive strategy for the community.

Requirements for Achieving Sustainability

Identify key partners. Sustainability of programs or services begins with identifying organizations that are comfortable partnering with others. In some instances, organizations may have complementary services such as a job training program that needs placements for its trainees or a housing rehabilitation organization that needs workers. In other cases, they may have related activities such as social services that can share staff or facilities. Organizations receiving funding from Weed and Seed or willing to work in support of the strategy without funding from Weed and Seed must provide the Steering Committee with data on program outcomes on a regular basis.

Assess resource needs. Before allocating Weed and Seed funding, organizations should demonstrate how they will leverage other funding sources to sustain the program beyond Weed and Seed funding. Avoid supporting startup programs with no clear plan for securing additional funding to grow the program.

Maximize impact. Look for programs that can demonstrate change among children, youth, or adults that can be incorporated into the strategy. It is also critical that all programs include an intake and closeout process to capture data that

measure change in the participants. Explore how resources from other organizations may support the expanded capacity of the solid programs that need to continue in support of the strategy.

The following grid (table 3) should help the Steering Committee assess the impact of programs in the community, including those receiving funding support from Weed and Seed.

Resource Development Sustainability

Despite a Weed and Seed site's best efforts to leverage local resources, the loss of Weed and Seed funding can potentially stall the continued implementation of the strategy. The dimension of financial sustainability represents the greatest concern for most sites—and the most challenging.

CCDO requires every site to develop an implementation plan that describes the various activities and tasks to be carried out to achieve the planned objectives. Although partners identified in the plan agreed to work together on specific tasks, the implementation plan also includes a timeline and baseline indicators to measure performance. The design of the implementation plan intentionally excludes consideration of financial resources needed to support the goals to avoid having sites focus on allocation of Weed and Seed funds rather than the development of a comprehensive strategy.

Although the question of financial resources is not included in the implementation plan, this does not mean it should be ignored. In fact, resource development sustainability begins with linking the activities and tasks outlined in the strategy with a realistic assessment of what resources will be necessary to support their implementation. Each component of the strategy requires financial resources well beyond Weed and Seed funding. Organizations seeking public- and private-sector funding increasingly find the issue of sustainability included in guidelines for proposals. Typically, applicants will be asked to describe plans to sustain the proposed program beyond the life of the grant. Applicants that fail to address this question signify to the reviewer that sustainability planning has yet to be considered.

For programs or special initiatives operating in the Weed and Seed site, there are two challenges to be addressed within the context of the sustainability plan. First, if Weed and Seed funding fills funding gaps in programs or special initiatives, the Steering Committee must determine

how these gaps will be filled by other sources in the future. Sometimes government agencies serving on the Steering Committee may agree to incorporate the cost of a program or service in the agency's budget. Second, organizations and agency partners that offer programs and services that do not receive Weed and Seed funding may experience reductions in their respective funding levels that could threaten the continued offering of programs and services in the community. The financial options for these committed organizations to secure alternative funding can serve as a major threat to the success of the Weed and Seed strategy.

Sites may consider different strategies for addressing financial sustainability and generating financial resources to sustain Weed and Seed activities. The challenge is to find funding sources that support parts of the strategy. It is unlikely that a funding source will be willing or able to support the entire strategy. Most sources prefer not to absorb the cost of existing collaborations if they have not been engaged from the beginning; however, there may be an interest in funding quality programs that have demonstrated success.

An effective approach for addressing the resource development of the sustainability plan requires separating the overall strategy into manageable components and identifying potential funding targets that may be interested in a particular component. Support may also be given to community partners seeking state or federal grants to support aspects of the strategy. Encouraging Steering Committee partners to seek out new funding sources in support of elements of the overall strategy is the optimum demonstration of a successful collaboration model.

There are various funding sources that may support elements of the Weed and Seed strategy, including—

- Local or regional foundations.
- Civic organizations.
- Government agencies.
- Professional organizations.
- Financial institutions.
- Major corporations.
- Small businesses.
- Individual donors.

The Steering Committee must resist the challenge to control all of the resources that support the community's strategy. Instead, it should help increase the capacity of partnering organizations to pursue alternative resources to CCDO funding.

Before appealing to potential funding sources, the completion of the sustainability plan will clearly outline the goals and objectives to be accomplished in the community as well as outline the roles of each collaborating partner in supporting this strategy. The plan also provides a blueprint of the resources currently invested in elements of the strategy and the total resources required to continue the various elements. Determine which partners may be appropriate to pursue funding on behalf of the Weed and Seed strategy. These partners must be willing to maintain careful records, report measurable outcomes, and, ideally, express their pledge of commitment to the Weed and Seed strategy.

Developing the Sustainability Plan

Sustainability planning involves assessing the past performance of programs and services offered in the community, identifying potential gaps or service risks, and expanding the base of collaborative partners.

Although the comprehensive strategy was developed as part of the OR application process, the sustainability plan picks up from this approved strategy and challenges a site to begin working early in the designation period to continually assess the various dimensions of sustainability. Based on potential problems or concerns that surface, the site can work to address these issues to minimize impact on the implementation of the strategy.

Developing the sustainability plan can only occur with a shared commitment to the community's vision. If your site has not formulated a solid vision statement, take the time to develop this statement as the first step in the planning process. Ideally, developing a community vision statement with full community participation helps clarify the overall purpose of the Weed and Seed designation and strengthens the community's collective resolve to work together for change.

Over the years, new ideas may surface regarding approaches to achieve strategy goals. Great! Don't bind the site to every aspect of the strategy if alternative tactics are discovered that might yield greater outcomes for the community. While a site cannot change the goals in the OR (the goals should support the priorities your community identified during the needs assessment process), you can always change the tactics to achieve these goals. Planning is an evolving process that must incorporate data from past activities and lessons learned to make informed decisions about the future. If an approach tried in the first year fails, why repeat it?

Sustainability planning is linked with implementation of the local site strategy. It compels the Steering Committee to outline steps needed to continue the overall strategy beyond the Weed and Seed designation. The orientation of the sustainability planning process keeps the

Steering Committee from functioning as a funding source and encourages organizations to work together for the common good. Sustainability planning is new for many organizations and it will take some time to complete a good plan. All sites should set aside a segment of the Steering Committee's time to report on the progress of developing the sustainability plan and, ultimately, the results achieved by implementing this plan. Remember, just as it is important for organizations to report their

accomplishments in serving people, these organizations must also agree to provide evidence of their hard work in seeking additional resources to support their respective programs as well as the overall strategy.

The planning tool (table 4) presented on the following pages will be available online in a landscape format to provide additional space for writing. Please note that answers to many of the sections of this plan can be found in the site's existing strategy.

Summary

A Weed and Seed site has a unique opportunity to bring together an array of community organizations, local government, law enforcement, schools, faith-based organizations, and residents to address the level of crime and other challenges in the community that affect the overall quality of life. Whether the site is in its first year or nearing the end of its Weed and Seed designation, it is never too early to begin developing a sustainability plan.

Individuals tend to safeguard what they believe is important: sustaining activities in a Weed and Seed site is no different. As the Steering Committee begins to look closely at the programs and activities being carried out under the banner of Weed and Seed, it will become readily apparent what aspects should be sustained. Keeping focused on the vision for the community and the goals and objectives outlined in the strategy will help the Steering Committee, area residents, and other community stakeholders stay focused on achieving positive change in the community rather than on the distribution of subgrants. Although funding from Weed and Seed can be important in supporting key programs and activities, many other resources (cash and in-kind) are equally important. The Steering Committee should serve as the ultimate champion in identifying new resources that can enhance the work associated with the community's strategy. All of the goals and objectives outlined in the strategy cannot be achieved solely with the funding from Weed and Seed.

The community strategy submitted to CCDO as part of the OR application required many hours of volunteer time. Individuals who participated in the planning process worked hard to ensure that the strategy reflected the concerns and opportunities identified by community residents. With a full Steering Committee and site coordinator in place, developing a sustainability plan is the next step in ensuring that the concerns and opportunities are supported by a range of resources—and not tied solely to Weed and Seed funding. This funding should be viewed as an important tool to help launch a collaborative effort to

address a unified community vision. As the Steering Committee examines each of the dimensions of sustainability, it will become apparent which activities are making a positive difference for the community. Whether the positive change is linked to greater resident leadership resulting from the Steering Committee structure, the improved academic performance of youth as a result of a stellar after-school program, or even the relationship between residents and law enforcement, the ultimate role of the Weed and Seed strategy is to help ensure that these positive changes continue and expand throughout the community.

As the number of Weed and Seed sites continues to grow, each site becomes a source of information for new sites, in addition to that offered by CCDO staff and technical assistance providers. It is recommended that sites reach out to other sites to find out how sustainability is being addressed across Weed and Seed. Certainly, there will be different approaches that could be considered for your site. The key to sustaining efforts in the community developed as a result of Weed and

Seed is a sustainability plan. You will be surprised at the range of untapped resources that already exist just waiting to be tapped! Remember, community change is not linked to Weed and Seed funding. Weed and Seed helps to create a new beginning for communities. It is up to the community leadership to continue building from the foundation established to reach for higher goals. Armed with the resources available from CCDO and other government and private-sector partners, there is no limit to what positive changes can occur in your community.

Here are some final questions to consider as you embark on the development of a sustainability plan:

- What are we really trying to sustain?
- What is the most critical resource that could be lost when Weed and Seed funding comes to an end?
- How much of our strategy is linked solely to Weed and Seed funding?
- Are we prepared to seek out other resource partners?

Web Resources

After School Alliance

www.afterschoolalliance.org/sustain.pdf

America's Promise

www.americaspromise.org/files/COP_March2003.pdf

American Association of Grant Professionals

www.grantprofessionals.org

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance

www.cfda.gov

Collaborations: Process and Pitfalls

www.lff.org/about/arizona/YA_Workshop/Collaborations_Process_Pitfalls.pdf

Community Tool Box

http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/section_1297.htm

Foundation Center

www.fdncenter.org

Gifts-In-Kind International

<http://giftsinkind.org>

Grant Proposal.com

www.grantproposal.com/inquiry.html

Grantsmanship Center

www.tgci.com

GuideStar (NPO database and resources)

www.guidestar.com

HUD Community Planning and Development

www.comcon.org

Nonprofit Good Practice Guide
www.npgoodpractice.org

Nonprofit Times
www.nptimes.com

Sustainability
www.sustainabilityonline.com

Sustainability Basics
www.nwrel.org/mentoring/pdf/part1.pdf

The Federal Register
www.gpoaccess.gov/nara/index.html

The Finance Project
www.financeproject.org

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