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## Prevention Program Sustainability and Associated Determinants: A Literature Review, Version 1.0

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# Prevention Program Sustainability and Associated Determinants

A Literature Review, Version 1.0

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National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center

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Science and  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has made millions of dollars available through the Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention (TVTP) Grant Program to help communities across the United States develop capabilities to combat terrorism and targeted violence. Given this investment, a key objective is ensuring the long-term impact of these programs, which depends on their sustainment beyond the initial grant. Thus, the purpose of this report is to review the relevant literature on program sustainability and discuss implications for the TVTP Grant Program.

We began the review by exploring definitions of sustainability as well as similar social programming concepts, such as adaptation, scalability, and impact. Our review found no consensus definition for prevention program sustainability, suggesting the TVTP Grant Program should develop a bespoke definition guided by strategic program priorities and incorporating other social programming concepts as needed. We then examined the determinants, or factors related positively to long-term programmatic success, of sustainability. All determinants relate to capacity building at two levels:

1. **Organizational (Internal).** Internal organizational capacity is impacted by (a) internal stakeholder buy-in and engagement, (b) adequacy of personnel resources, particularly in terms of expertise, (c) the presence of ongoing evaluation activities to support adaptations, and (d) support from the funding agency.
2. **Community (External).** External community capacity is impacted by (a) external stakeholder buy-in and continued engagement beyond the initial award, and (b) the fit between the program offerings and community needs.

Based on the above review, we offer the following implications of this literature for the TVTP Grant Program:

1. **Define sustainability.** To best achieve program goals, DHS should develop a clear operational definition of sustainability, beginning with a focus on program maintenance beyond the lifecycle of initial funding and refining as necessary.
2. **Clarify application tracks.** Given differences in the development stages between the two TVTP Grant Program tracks (Promising Practices, Innovation), DHS should reconsider the sustainability aspect of Innovation track projects, potentially excluding it or replacing it with a more appropriate requirement.
3. **Create sustainable evaluation criteria.** By incorporating specific sustainability determinants into the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) and establishing clear evaluation criteria, the TVTP Grant Program can better identify applicants with a high likelihood of sustained success.
4. **Enhance sustainability support.** To ensure sustainability, continuous planning throughout the award process and after the project's completion is crucial. This can be facilitated by using research-backed tools and leveraging existing DHS resources, such as Regional Prevention Coordinators (RPCs) and DHS's Prevention Resource Finder.
5. **Inform program evaluation.** Sustainability should be included as a medium- and long-term outcome metric for TVTP Promising Practice track projects, facilitated through systematic follow-up surveys and robust short-term evaluation evidence to guide necessary adaptations.

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# Prevention Program Sustainability and Associated Determinants: A Literature Review

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## Introduction

Between 2015 and 2022, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has made \$60 million dollars available through the Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention (TVTP) Grant Program to help communities across the United States develop capabilities to combat terrorism and targeted violence. Managed by the Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships (CP3), the program provides grant funding to state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) governments, nonprofits, and institutions of higher education to enhance the capabilities of locally based TVTP programs through a public health, whole-of-society approach. As described on CP3's website, "[t]hrough technical, financial, and educational assistance, CP3 supports local efforts that prevent individuals from radicalizing to violence and intervene with individuals who may be radicalizing, or have radicalized, to violence." Local prevention capacity is a key federal policy priority, as evidenced by its emphasis in the *National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism* (White House, 2021) and the Department of Homeland Security's *Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence* (DHS, 2019). Consistent with other federal prevention-focused grant programming (e.g., those funded by public health agencies and the Department of Justice), the long-term impact of the TVTP Grant Program depends on program sustainment beyond the initial period of performance (Scheirer, 2005). As part of a larger effort to gather evaluation evidence for TVTP Grant Program sponsored by the DHS Science & Technology directorate, the purpose of this report is to provide a review of the relevant literature on program sustainability and call out implications that may be beneficial to the TVTP Grant Program.

There is an extensive line of scholarly evidence examining the efficacy of community-level prevention programs and interventions in a variety of fields that has been produced in recent years (e.g., criminology and criminal justice, Gutierrez et al., 2018; youth mentoring interventions, Raposa et al., 2019; health disparities, Brown et al., 2019; substance abuse and overdose, Mueller et al., 2015). Prior research suggests that community-level prevention programs and interventions designed with a solid theoretical foundation (Hawkins et al., 2020; Thompson & Leroux, 2022) and are evidence based (Johnson et al., 2004, 2017; Meyers et al., 2012; Palinkas et al., 2020b) fare better in terms of performance and sustainability than those without theoretical and empirical support. However, the effectiveness of interventions that address violent extremism and targeted violence has received mixed support (e.g., Aldrich, 2014; Brennan Center for Justice, 2019; Edwards et al. 2015; Lum et al., 2006), leaving practitioners in the difficult position of developing programming without clear best practices. Researchers have attributed this inconsistency to low base rates pertaining to the frequency with which these events take place (Baruch et al., 2018; Savoia et al., 2020; Thompson & Leroux, 2022), as well as broad variation in the types of programs that are classified as interventions intended to prevent violent extremism and targeted violence (e.g., threat assessment, bystander training, community awareness, and youth resilience; Edwards et al., 2015; Thompson & Leroux, 2022). Despite notable exceptions where outcomes of TVTP programs were examined in depth (Savoia et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2016), these base rate and variation factors contribute to difficulty in assessing causal

mechanisms of targeted violence and terrorism as well as limited empirical evidence TVTP programming efficacy (Baruch et al., 2018; Thompson & Leroux, 2022).

While the need for sustainability research has been clear in the healthcare and education fields for years (e.g., Han & Weiss, 2005; Scheirer & Dearing, 2011), targeted violence and terrorism prevention sustainability research, specifically, is still relatively sparse, due in part to the relatively short amount of time in which this topic has been systematically studied. Thus, researchers have called for greater attention and activity with respect to this topic. For instance, Johnson et al. (2017, p. 610) argue that sustainability in community-based programming and intervention is vital, and “among the most significant research and practice issues facing funders and practitioners.” In addition, terrorism and targeted violence prevention programming and related interventions are often initiated at the community level (McCants, & Watts, 2012; Romaniuk, 2015), which underscores a continued need for robust scholarly research aimed toward determining factors that may improve the odds of sustaining effective TVTP programs at this level (Luke et al., 2014; Palinkas et al., 2020b).

In the following sections, we contribute to the understanding of sustainability in a TVTP context by turning to the body of literature on the topic, which, when considered in its entirety, suggests an important foundational concern—how sustainability is defined. Next, we present themes across research that has sought to identify key determinants of sustainability. Finally, we conclude with implications of this research for the TVTP Grant Program.

## **Defining Sustainability**

There is a lack of consensus in the literature regarding how to specifically define “sustainability” (Barrera et al., 2017; Luke et al., 2014; Moore et al., 2017)<sup>1</sup>. Our review revealed over a dozen definitions of sustainability across fields (e.g., Bodkin & Hakimi, 2020; Elsworth & Astbury, 2005; Hill et al., 2011; Hodge & Turner, 2016; Paine-Andrews et al., 2000; Schell et al., 2013; Shediak-RizKallah & Bone, 1998; Scheirer, 2013; Scheirer & Dearing, 2011; US Agency for International Development, 1988; Whelan et al., 2018; Wisener et al., 2017; we provide these definitions in Appendix A). Varying definitions of sustainability are partially attributable to diverse disciplines studying this concept across siloed contexts and settings. In other words, there has been a lack of cross-disciplinary collaboration in research on program sustainability (Scheirer & Dearing, 2011). Indeed, varying definitions may be a function of sustainability objectives that vary from one discipline or program to the next. Despite this variability, there are similar components within these definitions that can help illustrate the meaning of sustainable intervention programming (Moore et al., 2017). Broadly, sustainability is long-term continuation of something, such as a program or its benefits (Hill et al., 2011; Hodge & Turner, 2016), and the capacity and resources to survive after the initial seed funding has expired (Paine-Andrews et al., 2000; US Agency for International Development, 1988). Sustainable programming includes various units of participation (e.g., individual, organizational, and community), and has

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<sup>1</sup> Barrera and colleagues (2017; p. 644) note that “[a]t least 11 different terms such as ‘maintenance,’ ‘continuation,’ ‘durability,’ ‘institutionalization,’ and ‘routinization’ are used to describe “sustainability,” which is the most broadly used term.

the “structures and process that allow a program to leverage resources to effectively implement and maintain evidence-based policies and activities” (Schell et al., 2013, p. 2).

While debate remains regarding whether sustainability should be viewed as a process or an outcome of intervention programming, many scholars have argued that it should be viewed as both. For instance, Scheirer (2005; Scheirer & Dearing, 2011) suggested that sustainability can be thought of as a part of the final stage in a program’s “life cycle” of implementation, while Johnson et al. (2004) argued that it should be considered the “life” of an intervention after initial funding is gone, rather than the mere success of the intervention. Others have argued that sustainability is a step-by-step process that is on-going and cyclical (Hall & Hord, 2010), requires a flexible process approach (Johnson et al., 2013)—adaptable to both internal and external forces and events (Castro et al., 2004; Johnson et al., 2004; Palinkas et al., 2020b), while maintaining strong fidelity to program assumptions, procedures, and goals (Blakely et al., 1987; Breitenstein et al., 2010; Castro et al., 2004; Meyers et al., 2012). Thus, in considering these arguments, it may be the case that sustainability is best conceptualized as a multidimensional concept that is linked to multiple aspects of a program, such as a program’s impact, outcome, adaptation, and scalability.

### ***Sustainability and Other Social Programming Concepts***

In thinking about sustainability, it is helpful to describe it relative to other social programming concepts, as sustainability may be considered the continuation of activities, outcomes, and/or impact over a period of time. See Table 1 for a definition of sustainability and other program concepts. In social programming, outcome and impact refer to changes resulting from a program’s activities (i.e., actions of the program; W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004). Outcome is often captured at the individual level of analysis, whereas impact is measured at the group or macro- level of analysis (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004). Outcomes may be captured in the short, intermediate, or long-term, whereas impact is often thought of in the long-term (Taylor-Powell & Henert, 2008). For violence prevention programs, if desired outcomes and impacts are present and a program is achieving its intended results, then sustainment of activities is desired. However, it is important to note that while it is thought that sustaining program activities is necessary to sustain outcomes and impact, impact and outcomes may be sustained intentionally or unintentionally without the continuation of program activities.

***Table 1. Sustainability and Other Social Programming Concepts***

Concept	Reference
<b>Sustainability</b> “Sustainability is the continued use of program components and activities for the continued achievement of desirable program and population outcomes.”	Scheirer & Dearing, 2011
<b>Scalability</b> “[T]he ability of a[n]... intervention shown to be efficacious on a small scale and or under controlled conditions to be expanded	Milat et al., 2013



under real-world conditions to reach a greater proportion of the eligible population, while retaining effectiveness.”

**Adaptation**

Additions, modifications, or deletions to programming

Blakely et al., 1987

**Outcome**

“[S]pecific changes in program participants’ behavior, knowledge, skills, status and level of functioning.”

WK Kellogg Foundation, 2004

**Impact**

“[O]rganizational, community, and/or system level changes expected to result from program activities, which might include improved conditions, increased capacity, and/or changes in the policy arena.”

WK Kellogg Foundation, 2004

To illustrate, program activities are often adapted—intentionally or unintentionally. Program adaptations may occur as additions, modifications, or deletions to a program’s activities (Blakely et al., 1987). For example, program adaptations may result from a program being used for a population that differs from the target population for which the program was created. In this case, the adaptation is intentionally made to cater to the service population (Chen et al., 2019). Conversely, adaptations to a program’s protocol may result unintentionally through a poor understanding of the program by those administering it. As Barrera and colleagues (2017) explain, program adaptations may occur for several reasons, and suggest that if adaptations enhance a program’s effectiveness and fit to the environment, then implementers will be more likely to sustain the program. Thus, adaptations to a social program’s activities may be useful to foster and sustain program outcomes and impact.

Scalability refers to a program’s ability to provide benefits to a greater proportion of the population – the process of executing this is known as scaling. Scaling largely occurs after a program has been developed, piloted, and has reliably met its intended results (Larson et al., 2017). Scaling may entail a single program serving more people or a single program being implemented in another place to service more people. Scalability is important because if program effectiveness can be maintained once a program is scaled, it helps to ensure that investments into programming and its benefits reach the public (Green et al., 2009; List, 2022). Scaling a program should be done carefully to ensure sustainability. For example, those scaling a program should be conscientious of whether a program will receive the support and fidelity to the program necessary for sustainability after a program is expanded to other contexts or populations. Upon scaling a program, a lack of strategic alignment, costs, or incompatibility with existing infrastructure may be barriers to sustaining a program (Milat et al., 2016). In order to overcome barriers and ensure sustainability when a program is scaled, a scalability assessment (e.g., Milat et al., 2016) and careful planning should be used.

**General Findings on Applied Sustainability**

One review of the literature suggests, based on various definitions of sustainability, that approximately 50 to 70% of social programs are sustainable for some period of time (Cooper et al., 2015;

Johnson et al., 2017; Scheirer, 2005). Further, not every intervention is, or should be, sustained (Johnson et al., 2004). Research into sustainability has been conducted in a wide range of contexts, including substance abuse (Johnson et al., 2017), entrepreneurship (e.g., community-enterprises; Van Meerkerk et al., 2013, 2018; family-owned business, Oudah et al., 2018), community self-organization (Edelenbos et al., 2018), and public health interventions (Luke et al., 2014). In one example, Luke et al. (2014) found sustaining public health programs can be challenging given limitations in budgetary resources and changes in the political climate. They also found differences between the longevity of state level and community level interventions due to differential access to resources and support—state level programming tends to have greater access to resources and support than at the community level. Notably, sustainability goes beyond securing funding (Bodkin & Hakimi, 2020; Shediach-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998). There are also ethical implications related to the sustainability of intervention programming. Interventions that are abruptly or prematurely ended may result in a loss in community trust and support (Goodman & Steckler, 1987). Therefore, it is important to ensure effective services are available beyond the termination of initial funding.

Program fidelity (adhering to well specified program components) throughout implementation is a necessity in continued programming success (Blakely et al., 1987; Breitenstein et al., 2010; Castro et al., 2004; Johnson et al., 2004). A common exception to this is adaptation based on local/intervention needs, though additions based on needs rather than modification of core programming components generally lead to better sustainability outcomes (Blakely et al., 1987; Castro et al., 2004; Larson et al., 2017). Drifting too far from the original intent of the intervention and the modality of programming may negatively impact the efficacy of the program. This in turn can affect the level and quality of services provided to the community. Further, intervention outcomes can be influenced by a variety of factors not related to the program (Larson et al., 2017; Yi & Duval-Couetil, 2021). Therefore, adaptation to internal and external events, and ongoing evaluation and feedback loops are necessary for sustaining a program or its benefits. Potential barriers and/or facilitators for program sustainability should be considered early in the planning and design phase (Cooper et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2004, 2013; Palinkas et al., 2020b).

## **Determinants of Sustainability**

Prior research on sustaining effective programs suggests there are many factors, also referred to in the literature as *determinants*, related to positive intervention outcomes and long-term success. When viewed as a whole, it is evident these determinants rely on an organization's ability for capacity-building (both internal and external). System capacity is a necessity (Friedman & Schreiber, 2007). Importantly then, capacity-building should be viewed as a determinant, rather than an outcome of program effectiveness and sustainability (Altman, 1995; Goodman et al., 1998).

While determinants of sustainability may vary in terms of level of importance depending on the type of programming and organization (Palinkas et al., 2020b; Oudah et al., 2018), there are some themes that appear across contexts. Specifically, successful sustainability operates across, and within, multiple levels, including the individual, organizational, and community level. For instance, at the internal organizational level, stakeholder buy-in and engagement, adequate personnel and expertise, data collection and evaluation, technical assistance, and diverse, long-term funding sources have all been found to play a part in long-term

sustainability. External (or community level) sustainability determinants also include stakeholder buy-in and continued engagement as well as access to information, expertise, and advising to understand program goals and navigate implementing the intervention. The following section will go into greater detail on each of these determinants of sustainability.

### ***Internal Organizational Capacity***

Meyers et al. (2012) stress the importance of organizational capacity in program implementation and sustainability. Internal capacity includes buy-in and engagement at all levels of staffing (Johnson et al., 2004), and, as described in more detail below, is impacted by the culture, leadership, governance, and decision-making processes of an organization. It also includes adequate knowledge and training for those within the organization who are tasked with delivering services (e.g., intervention programming; Cooper et al., 2015). Further, delivery (services) and support (technical) teams need to work together.

### ***Stakeholder Buy-In and Engagement***

In order to foster internal stakeholder buy-in and engagement, prior research has noted several important factors that must be considered. Positive relationships (Cooper et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2004; Meyers et al., 2012; Stirman et al., 2012; Van Meerkerk et al., 2018), partnerships (Schell et al., 2013), and collaboration (Palinkas et al., 2020b; Van Meerkerk et al., 2018) are key. However, it goes beyond such simple constructs. Relationship building and maintenance (Meyers et al., 2012; Thompson & Leroux, 2022) and multi-directional communication (Cooper et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2004; Schell et al., 2013; Thompson & Leroux, 2022) are needed to enhance and improve intra-agency cohesion and effectiveness. It is shared ownership of the intervention's goals and procedures, starting at the top of the organization down to the rank-and-file staff, that contributes to long-term program sustainability (Bradford et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2004, 2017; Lean et al., 2015; Meyers et al., 2012; Stirman et al., 2012; Thompson & Leroux, 2022).

### ***Adequate Personnel and Expertise***

Human capital, or the relative economic value of an employee's knowledge and skills, is one of the greatest strengths and challenges an organization may encounter. This is especially true in community-level programming. Human capital considerations including, for example, considerations related to staff performance, satisfaction, retention/turnover, are a key element for sustainability (Crook, et al., 2011). Employee turnover (at all levels) in community-based organizations is often high (Van Meerkerk et al., 2018). Low morale among staff leads to turnover (Mihalic & Irwin, 2003) and can be compounded by a perception of a lack of administrative support (Johnson et al., 2004, 2017).

Proper levels of personnel and appropriate expertise are necessary for program implementation and sustainability (Cooper et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2004, 2017; Meyers et al., 2012; Mihalic & Irwin, 2003). Clear roles and responsibilities must be defined for leaders and staff, including any volunteers (Cooper et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2004, 2013). There must be a solid and shared understanding of a program's assumption, goals, and the skills necessary for implementation (Cooper et al., 2015; Edelenbos et al., 2018; Meyers et al., 2012; Palinkas et al., 2020b; Van Meerkerk et al., 2018). To that end, training and professional development to ensure those implementing the intervention services are equipped for the complexities and

challenges of community-based programming are essential for sustainability (Cooper et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2004, 2013, 2017; Mihalic & Irwin, 2003; Palinkas et al., 2020b).

The role of strong leadership and governance for sustainability cannot be overstated (Cooper et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2004; Lean et al., 2015; Palinkas et al., 2020b; Thompson & Leroux, 2022; Van Meerkerk et al., 2018). This includes effective leadership skills and decision-making structures (Oudah et al., 2018), as well as comprehensive oversight and continued accountability (Johnson et al., 2004, 2013; Meyers et al., 2012). Depending on the types of services provided (e.g., social services), Thompson and Leroux (2022) stress that clinical and service expertise and oversight may also be required.

At both the administrative and implementation staff levels, attention to sustainability should ideally start at the beginning of implementation planning and continue indefinitely (Cooper et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2004, 2013; Palinkas et al., 2020b). An initial needs assessment and on-going strategic planning are integral for long-term success (Bodkin & Hakimi, 2020; Cooper et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2004, 2013; Meyers et al., 2012; Oudah et al., 2018; Palinkas et al., 2020b; Schell et al., 2013; Van Meerkerk et al., 2018). Adaptation based on changes in community-need and internal and external events may be necessary as well (Blakely et al., 1987; Bodkin & Hakimi, 2020; Green & Plsek, 2002; Johnson et al., 2017; Meyers et al., 2012; Schell et al., 2013; Van Meerkerk et al., 2018), while ensuring that fidelity to the original program components remains (Blakely et al., 1987; Castro et al., 2004; Johnson et al., 2004; Meyers et al., 2012).

### *Ongoing Evaluation and Data Collection*

Development of an evaluation design at the beginning of intervention planning supports sustainability (Akerlund, 2000; Salazar et al., 2015) and should include input from key stakeholders (Mears, 2010; Salazar, et al. 2015). This will help inform the needs of the program within the community (Guyadeen & Seasons, 2018; Johnson et al., 2004; Mears, 2010), as well as data collection and analysis strategies (Akerlund, 2000; Johnson et al., 2004). Thus, effective evaluation is a critical program success and sustainability factor (Akerlund, 2000; Meyers et al., 2012; Salazar et al., 2015).

The evaluation design should include a *formative evaluation* to determine needs and services to be provided by the program and the feasibility of providing those services. This is completed during the planning stage and prior to implementation of the intervention (Akerlund, 2000; Johnson et al., 2004; Mears, 2010; Salazar et al., 2015; Thompson & Leroux, 2022). Once implementation is underway, an ongoing *process evaluation* (examining whether the program is being implemented as intended) is necessary to determine if any adaptations need to be made early on in the program implementation (Akerlund, 2000; Guyadeen & Seasons, 2018; Hawkins et al., 2020; Mears, 2010; Meyers et al., 2012; Thompson & Leroux, 2022). Of particular importance noted in the literature is the need for supportive feedback mechanisms (Johnson et al., 2004; Meyers et al., 2012), or *feedback loops* (Thompson & Leroux, 2022), during the formative assessment and process evaluation stage. This helps to mitigate knowledge mobilization delays (Thompson & Leroux, 2022) and address areas for improvement as well as changes in data requirements in real time and throughout the entire implementation phase (Johnson et al., 2004). Any programming adaptations that may be necessary can then be made or adjusted as needed.

Once the program has been implemented for a pre-determined period (e.g., three years after initial implementation), an outcome (short-term to intermediate goals) evaluation should take place (Mears, 2010; Salazar et al., 2015), followed, in time, by an impact evaluation (long term effects, both intended and unintended; Guyadeen & Seasons, 2018; Mears, 2010). The specific length of time from implementation to assessment of outcomes varies based on the individual program and whether the desired outcomes are short-term or long-term (Hawkins et al., 2020). Outcome evaluations for community-based interventions should generally take place well after the intervention has been established; however, while developing the initial program evaluation design, attention must be paid to the organization's capacity for data collection and analysis, including operationalization of outputs and outcomes, and data storage, analysis, and reporting (Johnson et al., 2004, 2013, 2017; Palinkas et al., 2020b; Schell et al., 2013). These will impact the scope, reliability, and validity of any outcome evaluation. A cost-benefit analysis (e.g., the relative direct benefit accrued for every dollar spent) is valuable to determine program efficacy and sustainability (Guyadeen & Seasons, 2018; Mears, 2010; Salazar et al., 2015), though these types of evaluations are far more complex and require specific expertise and resources that would need to be considered early in the planning stages. External advisors may be helpful in this regard (Oudah et al., 2018).

While there are theoretical foundations for how and why a specific program should operate, evaluation theories explicitly propose best practice methods for developing an evaluation design specific to each program. Evaluation theories explore how to approach evaluation, which questions to ask and assumptions to make, and which audience and preferences to consider (Greene, 2012). Given the complexities regarding factors that influence a program and its evaluation (Yi & Duval-Couetil, 2021), scholars have turned to scientific realism or "realistic evaluation" (Pawson & Tilley, 1994, 1997) to guide the evaluation design process. Scientific realism suggests outcomes must be understood in relation to the mechanisms and contexts that allow for them. The realistic evaluator focuses on understanding how a program operates by, from the outset, critically considering how internal and external forces, mechanisms, and contextual differences may interact to contribute to patterns of outcomes. Realistic evaluators ask, "what works for whom, in what contexts, in what respects and how[?]" (Westhorp et al., 2011, p. v). Only after answering those preliminary questions should the program be evaluated. Hypotheses can then be further specified toward a theory of how the program operates.

### ***Technical Assistance and Funder Representatives***

Finally, technical assistance and guidance from funder agency representatives can be invaluable resources for program sustainability. This includes information technology expertise, advising on data collection and storage methods, evaluation design and, of particular importance, funder agency expectations. Johnson et al. (2017) found that funding agency representatives can assist community intervention programs in "recruiting new coalition members and organizations, accessing and leveraging prevention resources, building expertise, planning and implementation" (p. 618). Edelenbos et al. (2018) and Van Meerkerk et al. (2018) discuss the need for *boundary spanners* (similar to the role of CP3 Regional Prevention Coordinators [RPCs]) to help organizations link internal resources to external networks. By extension, this increases a program's ability to maintain, increase, and diversify external funding sources (Johnson et al., 2004, 2013,

2017; Meyers et al., 2012; Palinkas et al., 2020b; Van Meerkerk et al., 2018) and may increase community-level engagement (Edelenbos et al., 2018).

### *External (Community Level) Capacity*

Public administration scholars suggests that a key element to successful intervention and programming sustainability at the community level requires strong initial community stakeholder buy-in and continued community engagement (Akerlund, 2000; Edelenbos et al., 2018; Meyers et al., 2012; Van Meerkerk et al., 2018). Community engagement and community-based targeted violence interventions are considered an integral part of the overall TVTP programming landscape (Cherney & Hartley, 2017; Clarke & Chenoweth, 2006) and is a specific area of focus for funding at both the federal and state level. Targeted violence prevention is a collaborative effort, often between citizens, practitioners, academic institutions, and local law enforcement. For example, threat assessment awareness and reporting require positive and constructive interactions between community members and law enforcement officers.

### *Stakeholder Buy-In and Continued Engagement*

Public recognition, acceptance, targeting community needs, and perceptions of legitimacy all play a role in the success of community level interventions (Van Meerkerk et al., 2018). Research has suggested that a common purpose (or a shared threat) is necessary for community self-organization and action (Edelenbos et al., 2018; Thomas, 2016; Van Meerkerk et al., 2013). However, this can be a challenge in establishing TVTP community-based programming because community members (i.e., potential key stakeholders) may not see targeting terrorism as a local/community priority (Clarke & Chenoweth, 2006; Ellis & Abdi, 2017; Lemyre et al., 2006). Communities may view these efforts (especially those that may involve law enforcement) as insincere, harmful, or discriminatory to particular populations within that community (Brennan Center for Justice, 2019; Cherney & Hartley, 2017; Thomas, 2016). A “broad cross-section” of citizens and community involvement, however, can enhance organizational and intervention programming legitimacy (Edelenbos et al., 2018). This, in turn, is important for building trust and, ultimately, sustainability and long-term success. Community partners, also referred to as *program champions*, can provide a much-needed link between program administration and staff and the broader community impacted by the intervention (Bodkin & Hakimi, 2020; Johnson et al., 2004; Meyers et al., 2012; Palinkas et al., 2020b; Van Meerkerk et al., 2018).

Positive relationships and collaboration between the internal stakeholders and the external community-level stakeholders are an important determinant of sustainability (Cooper et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2004; Stirman et al., 2012); however, Thompson & Leroux (2022) argue that positive collaboration is not enough. A sense of trust between partners and relationship building are key. If these relationships are not maintained, trust may erode and community support can diminish due to perceived non-cooperation (Edelenbos et al., 2018; Thompson & Leroux, 2022). This is not to say that these relationships must be conflict-free—indeed, research suggests that task-oriented conflict (e.g., deciding the next best course of action) can improve decision-making (Kerr & Tindale, 2004). However, relational conflict that leads to reduced trust will be counterproductive.

Community-level stakeholders, like internal stakeholders, also benefit from outside expertise and advising (Oudah et al., 2018; Thompson & Leroux, 2022), so they may better understand the program goals and outcomes—what Thompson and Leroux (2022) call “conceptual clarity.” Failure to provide such content expertise and technical assistance may contribute to misunderstanding and misinformation regarding a program, further eroding the community’s trust in the intervention (Thompson & Leroux, 2022). Community members need to feel that they are being included in the intervention process, at all stages (Edelenbos et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2004), to include the initial planning phase.

### *Partner Calibration*

A major component to community-level intervention program sustainability and long-term efficacy is tailoring the program and services to the community’s needs (Cooper et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2004; Meyers et al., 2012; Thompson & Leroux, 2022) and, further, that the community can provide those services as needed (Bodkin & Hakimi, 2020; Cooper et al., 2015; Meyers et al., 2012; Thompson & Leroux, 2022). This is often referred to in the literature as *calibration* or *fit* (see Thompson & Leroux, 2022). It requires a level of cultural competence (Feldsten & Glasgow, 2008; Johnson et al., 2004, 2017; Meyers et al., 2012; Palinkas et al., 2020b; Ruffolo et al., 2009; Van Meerkerk et al., 2018) and relies heavily on communication and feedback loops between internal and external stakeholders (Johnson et al., 2004; Thompson & Leroux, 2022).

Ensuring proper community partner calibration, and enhancing collaboration, inclusion, and positive relationships between internal and external stakeholders increases the likelihood of stronger community buy-in and can contribute to stronger real and perceived social capital (Van Meerkerk et al., 2018). Therefore, community buy-in and continued engagement is a key component to program intervention sustainability. A greater level of social engagement and the ability to raise capital increases the chances of acquiring future sources of revenue and funding to keep the interventions running (Akerlund, 2000; Johnson et al., 2004; Palinkas et al., 2020b).

Figure 1 summarizes the internal and external capacity factors discussed above, and conceptually displays how these factors relate to capacity and ultimately sustainability.

## **Sustainability in Practice**

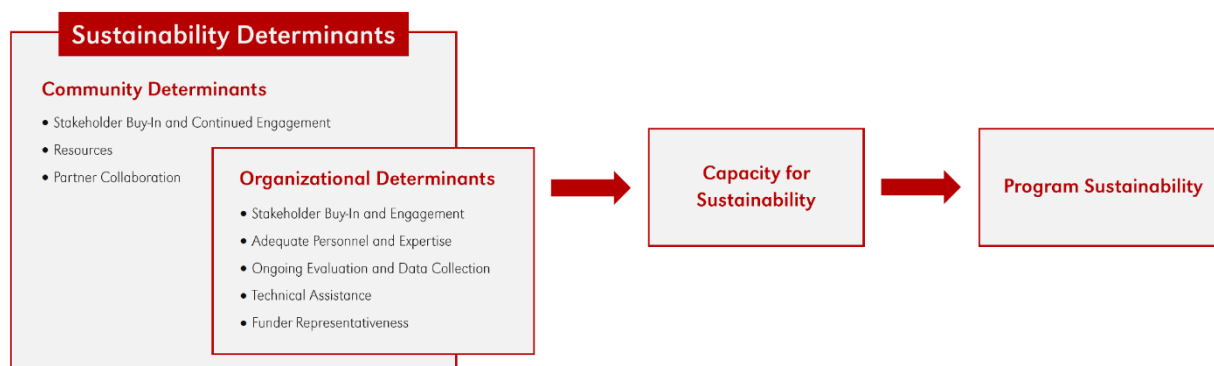
Armed with the knowledge of sustainability determinants, a critical follow-on question is: *How can funders and grant recipients use this information to enhance the probability of sustainability?* It is generally recognized that, at some level, *all* the major factors identified in Figure 1 are important to sustainability. Thus, one should seek to increase all aspects of capacity to increase the probability of sustainment. An example of how this can be used in practice is the Program Sustainability Assessment Tool (PSAT)©, published and maintained by Washington University.<sup>2</sup> This tool asks individuals involved with a program to rate statements (that align to many of the determinants described above) on whether the program does certain activities on a 1 to 7 scale, then provides scores on eight dimensions. Factors with

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<sup>2</sup> [www.sustaintool.org](http://www.sustaintool.org)



lower average scores are areas for targeting additional activities to improve capacity. Thus, the sustainability determinants are not, according to this literature, compensatory— that is, a strong capacity in one area will not make up for the lack of capacity in another area. Rather, it is assumed that some determinants are more critical than others, but there is no consensus as to which factors and the degree to which they are more predictive of sustainability. Instead, the rationale underlying their importance has been derived by research that has examined the relative importance of certain determinants (e.g., Johnson et al., 2017; Palinkas et al., 2020b; Schierer, 2005; Stirma et al., 2012). These studies support emphasizing determinants that relate to adaptation (e.g., ongoing evaluation, modifications over time), personnel capacity (e.g., expertise, presence of a champion), resource capacity (e.g., funding, institutionalization), clear program benefits (leading to stakeholder support), and good collaboration/relationships among program coalition members.



**Figure 1: Sustainability Factors Summary**

These determinants may interact with one another and can change over time. For example, Stirman and colleagues (2012) described the sustainability of a new program as a dynamic set of processes and interactions—both the organization and the program itself must adapt over time to align to one another to ensure sustainability. Thus, as described previously, it is critical not just to think of sustainability as achieved or not achieved, but as a continuous process that occurs over time. In this light, high degrees of capacity reflect the characteristics of healthy organizations and programs that are resilient to disruptions that may derail others.

## Implications for TVTP Grant Program

The Fiscal Year 2023 TVTP Grant Program Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO; DHS, 2023) requires applicants to include a section regarding program sustainability in their project narrative, and evaluation of that section contributes 15% to their final score (see Appendix B for full text).<sup>3</sup> Thus, program sustainability is already an explicit expectation of entities applying for grant funding. However, the NOFO sections pertaining to sustainability do not reflect many of the findings captured in this review. Considering the body of literature on best practices regarding program sustainability and the goals of the TVTP Grant Program, we have identified five implications that may enhance the TVTP Grant Program’s ability to fund projects that will continue to deliver positive impact beyond the grantees’ period of performance. These five

<sup>3</sup> Sustainability requirements were also included in previous TVTP Grant Program NOFO’s.



implications include: (a) define sustainability, (b) clarify application tracks, (c) create sustainable evaluation criteria, (d) enhance sustainability support, and (d) inform program evaluation. The following section describes these implications in greater detail along with options for how to apply them.

### ***Implication 1: Define Sustainability***

Although the TVTP NOFO provides no concrete definition of sustainability, one is approximated in the following scoring criteria requirement: “A feasible plan to sustain all the capabilities developed by their project permanently without Federal funding” (p. 24; DHS, 2023). The term “all capabilities” can be interpreted in a variety of ways, such as continuation of all contracted activities or a subset of activities to achieve the same outcomes. However, as described above, ongoing formative evaluation and the ability to adapt programs to meet changing needs is a critical determinant of sustainability, so continuing the same activities upon project completion is not necessarily desirable in all cases. The term “permanent” is also unclear as the evidence for how one would demonstrate “permanence” at the end of the period of performance is not explicitly stated.

Using the information provided in the “Defining Sustainability” and “Sustainability vs. Other Terms” sections above, we believe there would be significant value in CP3 developing a clear operational definition of sustainability to best achieve program goals. Since (a) there is no agreed upon definition of sustainability and (b) the most appropriate definition will be a function of the needs of the program, CP3 can use the definitions above that focus on program maintenance beyond the lifecycle of initial funding as a starting point, then add other elements and refinements as appropriate. A narrower definition of sustainability will make the tasks of developing further guidance and reporting easier than definitions that are more accommodating of different forms sustainability.

### ***Implication 2: Clarify Application Tracks***

DHS funds two main application tracks—Promising Practices and Innovation. Projects funded under the Promising Practices track focus (mostly) on community-based public health interventions in eight categories, such as “civic engagement,” “youth resilience,” and “threat assessment and management teams.” As the name implies, projects funded under the Innovation track solicit applications for new TVTP capabilities. The results of the literature review above yields different implications for each of these tracks. Scheirer (2005) describes a series of overlapping stages in the development of a new public health program: (a) initiation, (b) development and adoption, (c) implementation, (d) sustainability (or discontinuation), and (e) dissemination. Using this framework, the inclusion of a sustainability requirement in the TVTP NOFO suggests that the funded projects should be in the “implementation” stage, which Scheirer (2005) describes as a program being put into “full practice within the target organization or community” (p. 322). The focus on implementation of known programming is consistent with the sustainability requirement in the TVTP Grant Program NOFO’s Promising Practices track.

However, in Scheirer's (2005) development stages, Innovation track projects are best classified as being in the "initiation" stage, which Scheirer (2005) describes as an idea that is "conceived by innovators within an organization or by researchers wanting to test a potential new solution to a problem or felt need" (p. 322). Evaluation of these projects will thus be different than evaluation of Promising Practices projects, as grantees are more likely to be evaluating the idea as a proof-of-concept. If successful, additional funding would be required to move the project through other development stages. Further, the robust literature on creativity and innovation emphasizes the critical role of risk-taking and failure (e.g., Khanna et al., 2016; Madjar et al., 2011). Innovation requires that some, and perhaps many, of the projects funded under this track should fail, making sustainability irrelevant. Taken together, this suggests the need for separate consideration of sustainability for Innovation track projects, such that it is excluded as an expectation, or there is a reasonable replacement for its requirement (e.g., contribution to extant academic knowledge of TVTP programming).

### ***Implication 3: Create Sustainable Evaluation Criteria***

One potential challenge for the TVTP Grant Program is how best to identify grantees with a high likelihood for sustained success. Once a clear definition of sustainability has been established, the NOFO can be updated to include key sustainability determinants to address this challenge. Incorporating sustainability determinants into the NOFO serves two purposes. First, as described previously, applicants are required to provide "a feasible plan" for sustainability (see Appendix B for full definitions). The research described throughout this paper can be used to describe the components that make a plan "feasible." Sustainability can also be suffused into the rest of the NOFO. For example, staff (e.g., technical capabilities, presence of a champion) are key to sustainability, and thus some consideration of those factors should be included in the NOFO sections regarding organizational and personnel capabilities. Second, inclusion of specific determinants in the NOFO allows for increased specificity in evaluation criteria. For example, anchored rating scales can be developed for different levels of sustainability likelihood to aid reviewers that may not be familiar with these determinants.

### ***Implication 4: Enhance Sustainability Support***

One clear conclusion from the sustainability literature is the importance of planning for sustainability throughout the life of the project. Inclusion of sustainability considerations in the NOFO is a good start, but success requires that planning continue throughout the award process and for support resources to be available after the project concludes. The literature yields good starting points for doing so. For example, Johnson and colleagues (2004; 2013; 2023) have over the last 20 years conducted research on "sustainability readiness." Building off the RAND Corporation's Getting to Outcomes® toolkit,<sup>4</sup> their research includes prescriptive guidance for developing and executing explicit sustainability plans for prevention programs in public health. Other instruments of sustainability have also been developed (e.g., Luke et al.,

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.rand.org/health-care/projects/getting-to-outcomes.html>

2014; Palinkas et al., 2020b), leading to a robust set of assessments and best practice guidelines. This research could be adapted to provide tools for TVTP grant award recipients to assist with achieving their sustainability objectives. As described previously, CP3 RPCs, with their ability to link programs to larger resource and support networks, could have a critical role to play in supporting new program sustainability. Additional materials could also be added to the extensive collection of support materials on DHS’s Prevention Resource Finder.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Implication 5: Inform Program Evaluation***

There have been frequent calls for the TVTP Grant Program to collect more robust evidence of success (e.g., GAO, 2021). Additionally, our review suggests programs that demonstrate success and adaptation are more likely to be sustained. Thus, the results of this literature review have implications for TVTP program evaluation. For TVTP Promising Practice track projects, sustainability, however defined, should be included as a medium- and long-term outcome metric. This can be achieved through systematic follow-up surveys of grant recipients. As with sustainability readiness, several surveys have been deployed to examine sustainability in other prevention programming and public health contexts. For example, Palinkas and colleagues (2020a) developed the “sustainment measurement system scale” that can be deployed post-funding to examine whether and how a program is being sustained. It includes several dimensions, such as sustainment indicators (example item: “The project continues to operate as described in the original application for funding,” response scale ranges from “a great extent” to “little or no extent”), funding and financial support (e.g., “The project has sustained funding”), and coalitions, partnerships, and networks (e.g., “The community members are passionately committed to sustaining the project”). Projects that are not successful should not be sustained however, so a key goal of TVTP Promising Practice grant recipients should be to collect robust short-term evaluation evidence to guide adaptations needed for sustainability. Collecting evaluation data over time that connects data from the initial program evaluation to sustainability outcomes will allow CP3 to refine processes and resources over time that are targeted to the unique context of TVTP grant programs.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this report was to provide a review of the relevant literature on program sustainability and discuss implications for the TVTP Grant Program. To accomplish this, we reviewed the available literature on sustainability and how it relates to other concepts, such as adaptation, scalability, and impact. We began the review by exploring definitions of sustainability. Our review suggests the definition used by the TVTP Grant Program should be guided by strategic program priorities and objectives (see the definitions provided in Appendix A and Table 1 as a starting point for doing so). We then summarized the literature examining determinants of sustainability, finding several internal (e.g., adequate personnel, ongoing evaluation) and external (e.g., resources, stakeholder buy-in) factors that enhance capacity (see Figure 1 for a summary). We conclude the paper with implications of our findings for the TVTP Grant Program, including (1) developing a clear definition of sustainability as it relates to TVTP programming goals, (2) clarifying the role of sustainability for the program’s two application tracks (Promising Practices, Innovation), (3) incorporating

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.dhs.gov/prevention>

sustainable evaluation criteria into the NOFO, (4) enhancing support for grantees' sustainability goals, and (5) incorporating sustainability into program evaluation. Taken together, we believe the TVTP Grant Program's performance objectives can be enhanced by incorporating elements of this literature into the grant's management processes.

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## Appendix A: Sustainability Definitions

**Table A1. Definitions of Sustainability Adapted and Modified from Bodkin & Hakimi, 2020**

Reference	Definition
Elsworth & Astbury, 2005	“A sustainable program is one that has become routinized in an organization as well as standardized within policy making institutions”
Hill et al., 2011	“Sustainability refers to the long term continuation of effective programs, or, where there is a set of activities aimed at achieving the programs objectives that are incorporated into the organizations routines.”
Hodge & Turner, 2016	“Sustained program implementation is whether a program operated over multiple years.”
Johnson et al., 2017	Length of time a program operates
Moore et al., 2017	“(1) after a defined period of time, (2) a program, clinical intervention, and/or implementation strategies continue to be delivered and/or (3) individual behavior change (i.e., clinician, patient) is maintained; (4) the program and individual behavior change may evolve or adapt while (5) continuing to produce benefits for individuals/systems.”
Paine-Andrews et al., 2000	“The extent to which community changes facilitated by the initiatives remained in place after grant termination and the extent to which the initiatives themselves remained in place after grant termination.”
Schell et al., 2013	“The ability to maintain programming and its benefits over time. Sustainability capacity is defined as the existence of structures and process that allow a program to leverage resources to effectively implement and maintain evidence based policies and activities”
Scheirer & Dearing, 2011	“Sustainability is the continued use of program components and activities for the continued achievement of desirable program and population outcomes”
Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998	“Sustainability is a global term used to refer to the general phenomenon of program continuation. Three perspectives on sustainability: 1) maintain health benefits achieved through the initial program 2) continuation of the program activities within an organization structure and 3) building the capacity of the recipient community”

Reference	Definition
U.S. Agency for International Development, 1988	“A project [is] successful in achieving its objectives during the project life but also that the benefits it generates continue beyond the time of the donor’s involvement”
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Adolescent Health, 2017	“[L]everag[ing] partnerships and resources effectively to continue programs, services, and/or strategic activities that result in improvements”
Wisener et al., 2018	“A sustainable program is: 1) receptive to change and adaptable 2) an innovative strategy that provides continued benefit 3) fully integrated into normal operations postproject funding 4) of benefit to diverse stakeholders”

## Appendix B: Screenshots of FY2023 TVTP NOFO Sustainability Content

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Proposal Body Text Guidance (pp. 69-70)

### iv. Sustainability

Applicants should expect to include a discussion of how the capabilities of the proposed project will be sustained following the period of performance.

Additional details on what to include in the Sustainability section of the application and how this information will be scored during the application review process can be found in Section E(1)(a): Application Evaluation Criteria - Programmatic Criteria. Additional questions that an applicant could consider addressing in this section are the following:

- Does your application propose to use grant funds to fund primary project personnel? If so, how might those positions to continue to be funded after the period of performance concludes?
  - Note - If the organization believes that key capabilities of its proposed project can be sustained following the period of performance *without* sustaining the positions of any key personnel funded under the award, that should be explained.
- Does your application propose to create an educational curriculum, training curriculum, or other prevention resource? If so, how might that education curriculum, training curriculum, or other resource continue to be maintained and updated following the period of performance? Will the resource continue to be available to the public, such as by being accessible online on the organization's website?
- If a Threat Assessment Team is being formed, what policies and agreements will be created to ensure that it continues to function following the end of the period of performance?
- If a referrals pipeline or hotline is being established, what policies and agreements will be created to ensure that this referrals pipeline or hotline continues to operate following the end of the period of performance?

Scoring Criteria (p. 24)

**Sustainability: 15 Points**

Applicants are required to describe how the activities and capabilities in their proposed project will be sustained following the end of the period of performance. To receive the maximum number of points applicants will outline:

- A feasible plan to sustain all the capabilities developed by their project permanently without Federal funding. In addition, simply seeking another source of federal funding does not demonstrate sustainability. – 10 Points
- How the proposed project fits into the larger mission of the organization and therefore the likelihood it will be maintained beyond the period of performance. For example, will the project be expanded into other locations and with other audiences following the end of the grant program? – 5 Points

Applicants who have previously received a TVTP award from DHS (Assistance Listing 97.132) will be required to describe how their proposed project complements, rather than just sustains, their past award. Applicants that propose sustainment and continuation of an existing or previous award without alteration will not be considered for funding.