Covering Kids and Families Evaluation

Sustainability From The Grantee Perspective

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PURPOSE

Sustainability of Covering Kids and Families (CKF) activities is becoming an increasingly important issue as grantees approach the end of their grant award periods. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) funded this program with the intention that Covering Kids and Families activities would be sustained after the grants ended. To encourage this outcome, the Foundation required grantees to work with community coalitions and to find a match for the funding RWJF provided. The Foundation wants to know which of the grantees’ activities appear likely to continue after the grant program ends and to hear about promising ideas for sustaining activities that may be useful to grantees. Although we can only predict what will be sustained (until the funding period is over), in October 2004 we organized a Reverse Site Visit with 11 CKF grantees to discuss what these grantees believed were best practices in sustainability. This memo summarizes the findings from that discussion.

METHODS

We used a reverse site visit to collect grantees’ perspectives on sustainable CKF activities. A reverse site visit brings together knowledgeable participants in order to gather information rapidly and cost-effectively on important topics. On October 26, 2004, we held the evaluation team’s second reverse site visit with CKF grantees. With help from the national program office (NPO), we selected six state and five local grantees to represent grantees believed to have focused on how to sustain their CKF activities after the grant ends. We invited the project director from each grantee to attend the one-day meeting in Philadelphia. Grantees attended from the following states: Arkansas, Iowa, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Washington (state grantees); and Arkansas, Florida, Iowa, Minnesota, and Oklahoma (local grantees).

Vern Smith of Health Management Associates facilitated the reverse site visit, and members of the evaluation team monitored the discussion and asked clarifying questions. Two experts on coalitions and sustainability, whose role was to ask questions, also attended. Observers from the NPO and RWJF sat in on sessions and responded to questions directed to them by the grantees. A list of participants is attached as Appendix A.
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We spent a day talking to the grantees about which of their CKF activities will be sustained after the CKF grant period is over and about the factors governing the likelihood of activities continuing. The day was divided into the following sessions: a morning plenary session, two simultaneous, but separate, state and local grantee sessions in both the morning and the afternoon, and a plenary session at the end of the day to discuss and sum up what we had heard. Because the morning plenary was intended to break the ice and provide context, we asked the 11 grantees “What is sustainability?” and asked each to give an example of a sustainable activity in which they had been involved. During the morning and afternoon sessions, we asked the grantees what CKF activities they thought were sustainable, what the strategies were to ensure that an activity continued, and the lessons they had learned during CKF (or earlier grants) about sustaining activities. The following day, the evaluation team and the experts met to review and summarize what we had learned.

We presented the findings to the CKF Partners during the regular Partners’ conference call on December 14, 2004. These key findings are the subject of this memo.

KEY QUESTIONS AND FINDINGS

Key Questions

Implicit in our protocol for the reverse site visit were the following aspects of sustainability: institutionalization of changes, survival of activities, and community capacity building.¹

The key issue for RWJF is whether the activities CKF grantees undertake to enhance health insurance coverage of children and families will continue after the grant program is over. Such activities could continue under the auspices of a continuing grantee’s sponsoring organization or its coalition, including its community partners. Thus we are not interested solely in survival of the grantees themselves, but we are interested in whether CKF activities will be sustained. The survival of the grantee or coalition is germane as it affects sustainability of CKF activities. First, then, we asked grantees about using coalitions to sustain the coverage activities. Second, we wanted to know which activities grantees predict will be sustained (with or without the grantee organization or coalition) and strategies they will use to ensure this occurs. The role of the grant funding and other financing in assuring survival of coverage activities is one of interest to the Foundation. And third, we asked the grantees how much of their CKF outreach, simplification, and coordination activities they would have done without the CKF funding.

¹Another aspect of sustainability that we did not address is outcomes at the individual level—in the case of CKF, increased coverage. Scheirer 2005 discusses the definition of sustainability in the context of evaluating program sustainability. (Scheirer, M.A., “Is Sustainability Possible?”, American Journal of Evaluation, vol. 26, no. 3, September 2005, pp 320-347.)
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How Do Coalitions Promote Sustained Coverage Activities?

RWJF required grantees to have coalitions because of its belief that coalitions are important for developing a shared commitment on how to achieve the goal of increasing insurance coverage of children and families. Coalitions are also key to sustaining activities after grant periods end. Grantees devised coalition-building strategies to operate their programs and to enhance the likelihood that coverage activities would be sustained. They also educated their coalitions on the importance of sustaining activities after the grants were over. There are challenges to keeping coalitions going and a number of lessons for how to do so.

Grantees identified several key strategies for developing effective coalitions:

- Include the right people in the coalition; that is, those controlling resources critical for accomplishing CKF goals (such as schools and safety net providers who have access to uninsured children and their parents).
- Include ethnic and faith-based community groups in the coalition to help ensure sustainable activity, since these organizations have the trust and attachment of the targeted populations and can “implant” the idea of applying for SCHIP and Medicaid coverage in their communities.
- Use coalition meetings to build strong relationships and also attend public meetings of coalition members to strengthen these relationships.
- To facilitate the willingness of coalition members to take on CKF activities, ask them to take on activities similar to the ones they already know how to do.
- At the end of each coalition meeting, get coalition members to commit to specific assignments.
- Educate the coalition members about the importance of sustaining activities after the grant. Grantees recommended board retreats devoted to sustainability as a way of drawing coalition members’ attention to and stressing the importance of sustaining activities.
- Develop leadership within the coalition and within the grantee staff. Doing so will enhance the likelihood that the coalition and grantee can continue even with member or staff turnover; it can also increase capacity in the community. Grantee staff development can be facilitated if they attend and present at coalition meetings.

A special challenge to stifle coalition longevity is found in rural areas:

- Rural areas have a much harder time building and sustaining activities because there are far fewer people to draw on and the active ones get overloaded.
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Grantees suggested the following lesson that they had learned about sustaining coalitions and their CKF activities.\footnote{The literature on program sustainability supports these lessons described by CKF grantees and suggests the importance of embedding programs in agencies that already focus on the topic.}

- Although they were hoping their strategies would survive, those coalitions formed for CKF and those that started out with only the RWJF funding stream seem less likely to survive than organizations that predate CKF and those with multiple funding streams.

Which of the Three CKF Strategies Will Be Sustained?

CKF has been built around three strategies: outreach, simplification, and coordination. We asked the grantees which of these core strategies would continue after the grant’s end, what the challenges would be in sustaining them, and whether they had learned any lessons they wanted to share with other grantees to promote sustained activities around these three strategies.

Sustaining Outreach

Grantees offered three strategies they had followed that they believe will result in outreach being sustained:

1. Institutionalize activities (embed them) in coalition partners (for example, get a school district to take over a regular mailing of coalition outreach activities).\footnote{To do this of course requires grantees to have brought the right partners to the table in the first place.}

2. Educate partners as to why health insurance is important and why it is in their interest to ensure that parents enroll their children.

3. Collaborate with schools, providers, and businesses because these groups have access to the parents of children. (Grantees noted that the understanding of why health insurance coverage is important varies across these three groups and thus requires varied approaches to collaboration.)

Nevertheless, sustaining outreach is likely to be a challenge for the same reasons that it has been a challenge during the program:

- Staff turnover means a sustained commitment to educating coalition staff and the staff of collaborators.

- Budget cuts for state outreach have made it harder to continue outreach and increased the necessity of embedding it in community partners.
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- It is hard to reach schools and businesses—grantees had to recruit them one at a time.

Grantees have **learned lessons** that that have a bearing on sustaining outreach:

- Be persistent with partners to get them on board.
- Keep outreach up even when budget cuts occur.
- Cross-train staff to minimize disruptions when staff members leave.

**Sustaining Simplification**

Over the past five years, grantees reported that the culture around public health insurance has changed, so that the need for application simplicity is now recognized. Grantees believe that many of the procedures that have been simplified are here to stay, though some simplified procedures may be rescinded when budget cuts occur. Grantees thought that the sustainability of simplification could be more fragile than the sustainability of outreach because outreach could be institutionalized in community partners whereas simplification is subject to budget pressures.

The grantees described four **strategies** for continuing simplification into the future:

1. Build relationships with state and county eligibility staff—develop a culture of cooperation
2. Educate state and county government staff as to why simplification is in their best interests (for example, it can save money)
3. To help state and county government partners solve problems, implement process improvements through collaboration (such as those that have taken place under the CKF grant auspices). These formal collaborations have proved an effective approach to joint problem-solving around barriers to enrollment partly because they facilitate exchange of information about barriers between frontline CKF and county and state staff.4
4. Include state and local government staff in the coalition.

Grantees found some of the same **challenges** for simplification activities as for outreach:

- Turnover of legislative staff due to term limits and turnover of high level program staff requires being ready to educate new people with facts

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4 Several of the grantees had participated in formal learning collaboratives with the NPO and found them an effective way to solve enrollment and renewal process problems. State and local government staff and grantee staff worked together on identifying barriers and testing solutions, bringing new ideas to bear on these problems.
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- Budget cutbacks may limit or reverse simplified processes

The **lessons** grantees **learned** about simplification are to do the following:

- Build relationships with state government staff and stop regarding them as “the enemy”
- Have good information and ideas to help get things simplified—the NPO and the process improvement collaborative have been instrumental in providing such information and ideas helping this along

**Sustaining Coordination**

Grantees had less to say about coordination, and what was said overlapped with the discussion of simplification.

Grantees mentioned one **strategy**:

- Relationship-building activities were important (as discussed under simplification).

The principal **challenge** grantees mentioned was the following:

- It is sometimes hard for state grantee staff to distinguish lobbying activities from policy formation activities. (Lobbying is not permitted using RWJF grant funds.)

**What Is the Role of Financing in Sustaining Activities in the Long Run?**

RWJF required all grantees to match their RWJF funds, an approach that was designed to prompt grantees to find alternative funding before the four-year grant period was over.\(^5\) The reverse site visit participants pointed out that grantees varied greatly in how this requirement affected their attention to long-term sustainability. They reported that some local grantee sites struggled to find the match, which interfered with developing strategies for sustaining activities. Other grantees found that the requirement to find the match had helped them think about long-term sustainability and funding; still others understood that obtaining matching funds was “business as usual” in the foundation world.

The grantees drew these **lessons** about financing:

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\(^5\)The grant application guidelines state “Beginning no later than Year Three, a match of at least 50 percent of the Foundation’s four-year grant will be required.” The guidelines go on to give permissible sources of matching funds.
Diversify funding streams to enhance the likelihood of organization survival (organization mission must be broad enough to encompass CKF, but be able to survive the end of CKF funding)

Use CKF funds as seed money to involve other organizations and get them to take on the activities around the three core CKF strategies

Grantees’ Summary Observations

Grantees who had already experienced complete grant cycles with RWJF or other funders found it easiest to extrapolate to the future—they knew what they had to do to survive and continue work. Even so, the grantees’ discussion of the above questions often became retrospective rather than prospective. This is natural and inevitable; the past is easier to talk about than a hypothetical future, and past experiences do hold lessons for the future. To refocus the grantees on the future and to sum up the day’s discussions, at the end of the meeting we asked them to reflect on which activities would continue after the grant funding was over, how much of this would have happened without CKF funding, and what they felt were the major lessons on sustainability for other grantees:

• What will continue after CKF funding ends? Many of the activities will continue, some because the coalitions will still be there, others because the grantees have successfully embedded the activities in other organizations, for example, outreach in community based organizations

• Could grantees have been so effective without CKF funding? CKF funding was critical as it allowed grantees to dedicate staff to the many activities described above. Particularly crucial to their success were technical assistance resources provided by the NPO, the process improvement collaborative, and the opportunities to meet with other grantees from around the nation.

What were the major lessons and keys to success that the grantees had learned?

Grantees summarized the following points:

• It was important to develop and nurture relationships with groups that had not cooperated in the past.

• Getting productive policies and processes into place required educating people with the facts.

• The recent recognition of the importance of simplified applications for public coverage should help to sustain coverage for children and families into the future.

• It probably is not possible to start out with a full idea of how to approach sustaining activities. Grantees must go through a learning process, even though some of the lessons described here may make the process shorter and less painful.
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IMPLICATIONS FOR RWJF GOALS.

Only in time will we know how many of the grantees have left a legacy of continuing coverage activities. As part of the second phase of the CKF evaluation, we will be looking into how much of the learning from CKF continues to be employed by grantee staff holding new positions—the capacity-building aspect of sustainability. Until then, the following implications of the reverse site visit findings can be useful to the Foundation:

• Funding grantees that come into existence to take advantage of the grant may not be the most productive use of funds, as such organizations (seen only at the local level in CKF) have a great deal to learn and may be less likely to continue after the grant ends.

• The requirement that each grantee have a community coalition is a good one—as long as grantees work with it—although this is more of a challenge for rural grantees who have fewer potential people to work with. Coalitions may be the best vehicle for extending coverage activities into the future.

• Grantees said that working cooperatively with the people whose activities and mindset they wanted to change is likely to be more effective than keeping a distance and viewing them as “the problem.” Specific technical assistance provided by the NPO, such as annual, regional and special topical meetings, helped grantees to work cooperatively, suggesting the importance of such technical assistance to achieving sustainability. Moreover, making resources available for meeting with peers and for technical assistance can be an effective way of augmenting knowledge and finding shared solutions to problems.
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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANTS IN THE REVERSE SITE VISIT

State Grantees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Organization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rhonda Sanders</td>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Borst</td>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>Iowa Department of Public Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elaine Cunningham</td>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>Children’s Defense Fund of Minnesota</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anne Roberts</td>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ann Bacharach</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children</td>
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<td>Penny Reid</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Washington Health Foundation</td>
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Local Grantees

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Debbie Smart</td>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>Our Children First Coalition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jean Kelsey</td>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>Variety Health Center Pilot Coalition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sonni Vierling</td>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>Healthcare Coverage for Kids Coalition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ebenezer Boakye</td>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>Jackson Health System/Florida KidCare Outreach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ginnie Westfall</td>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>Olmsted County Pilot</td>
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Evaluation Team

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<tr>
<td>Eileen Ellis</td>
<td>Health Management Associates</td>
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<td>Kathy Gifford</td>
<td>Health Management Associates</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vern Smith (Facilitator)</td>
<td>Health Management Associates</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ian Hill</td>
<td>The Urban Institute</td>
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<td>Brigette Courtot</td>
<td>The Urban Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judith Wooldridge:</td>
<td>Mathematica Policy Research</td>
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<td>Beth Stevens</td>
<td>Mathematica Policy Research</td>
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<td>Bridget Lavin</td>
<td>Mathematica Policy Research</td>
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Experts

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<tr>
<td>Len Nichols</td>
<td>Center for Studying Health Systems Change</td>
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<tr>
<td>Debra J. Rog, Ph.D.</td>
<td>Center for Evaluation and Program Improvement,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Vanderbilt University</td>
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Observers

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<td>Lori K. Grubstein, MPH, MSW</td>
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<td>Nicole Ravenall</td>
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<td>Southern Institute on Children &amp; Families</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jennifer Olsen</td>
<td>GMMB</td>
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