What makes a good sustainability plan?

What is sustainability?

Sustainability describes how a project will continue in the long term. Largely, plans for this focus on three main areas: community sustainability, financial sustainability, and organisational sustainability. With SHINE prioritising funding for school settings, there is a greater focus on community and financial sustainability.

Sustainability is about more than just sourcing funding to continue with the project. It is a combination of strategies to maintain all elements of the project and ensure continued positive outcomes for the community it is operating within. Overall, it is a school's ability to continue providing benefits to its community of users over an extended period of time.

Community sustainability seeks to address the issue of how well the project is rooted within the community in which it is being delivered. It may also describe how the community will continue with the project after the funding period ends. Over the past few years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of community sustainability. Increasingly, people recognise that without the support of the community, many projects may not survive. The community of people involved in the project should feel ownership of the project.

Financial sustainability describes the ability of a project to survive financially post funding. Here, we are looking to understand what kind of funding sources would be needed for the future to ensure the project can remain viable. Generally, there are two options: rely on external sources or internal sources:

♦ **External sources.** After the grant ends, the project would need to secure further money from outside of the school to continue

♦ **Internal sources.** The project plans to raise the money from within the school or through revenue-creating activities.

Why does SHINE think planning for sustainability is important?

As funders, SHINE wants assurances that funds will be put to effective use, that they will have long-term, lasting impact, and that the project will continue to provide benefits to children in the North, even after the grant is finished.

SHINE seeks to fund projects that have the potential to survive and thrive in the long term. As such, in the project application, the sustainability section should clearly detail how all aspects of the project will continue in the longer term to ensure the project offers sustained change over time and so that resources spent on the grant are not lost.

What does the guidance and research say about sustainable projects?

Most available evidence suggests that sustainability plans should provide detail around three main areas. As mentioned in the introductory section, these are the **community**, **financial** and **organisational** sustainability of the project.

Much of the research indicates that the most important factors that can influence a project's sustainability are ensuring the below are in place:

♦ Clear mission/theory of change for the project

♦ Robust monitoring and evaluation system

♦ Clarity on the adaptability of the approach

♦ Some form of staff training offered

♦ Not being heavily reliant on one source of funding

♦ The organisation's stability

♦ Integration into existing systems and political support

♦ Community support.

In any case, schools should ensure they have a proper plans and strategies, good governance, and effective leadership in place so that they can develop and sustain a project that will benefit their community for extended periods of time.

What might this look like in practice?

For SHINE applicants, **community sustainability** might include plans such as:

Including those involved in the project from the start in the planning and implementation of the project

For example, if the project has a heavy parental engagement aspect, a more sustainable project may have consulted parents in the project design. It might also seek to upskill parents to empower them to deliver aspects of the project in the future.

Consulting all stakeholders wherever possible to ensure they feel ownership of the project and that their opinions and preferences are being listened to and implemented.

For example, a project which works across primary-secondary transition should ensure that both primary and secondary schools are consulted in the development of the project ensuring there is equal ownership. They may choose to create a steering group which enables all parties to have an equal opportunity to shape the project.

Upskill and train staff

For example, to ensure the intervention is embedded into the school system, all staff should be involved in learning how the project should be delivered so that it can easily continue past the funding end. Some projects may choose to use 'train the trainer' models to embed practice.

Embed learning and change school systems

For example, a project that focuses on systematic change of a curriculum or school practice should have clear evidence that there is strong buy in at senior leadership level. This gives SHINE assurances that the learnings and practices implemented during the project life will continue long after the funding ends. Doing this may also support a project's financial sustainability as it may mean that the costs for delivering the project become lower over time as it becomes something 'we do' rather than 'a project we run'.

For **financial sustainability**, SHINE applicants should ask themselves what are the ongoing costs and how can we ensure these ongoing costs can be funded? The application may detail plans which include:

Repurposing existing funds

A project may aim to develop a clear evidence base that the intervention works so that a case can be put forward to repurpose existing school funds. During the grant, the plan would be to develop a clear evaluation and evidence base to present to the Board of Governors and Senior Leadership Team so they could repurpose the funds. With this, it should be extremely clear that the project costs are reasonable enough to be sustained from existing school monies.

Selling the model/training to other settings

If a project offers to train and upskill teachers for delivery, it may be an option in the future to market and sell this model to other settings to generate further funding to support future delivery.

Selling access to website/apps

If part of the application involves generating a website or app, an option could be to market or sell this to other settings to generate additional funding.

Additional grant funding

Some projects acknowledge that external sources of funding may be required in the future to continue with the project in some way. If this is the case, the application should be clear and precise as to how this funding would be sourced and include evidence of any earlier successes

Parent volunteer/champions

Upskilling parent champions, or involving them as volunteers in the future, supports the project's community and financial sustainability. It may mean that costs for delivery would be lower in the future. This method of sustainability should be used carefully and only as an addition to other funding as interventions run on goodwill alone carry risks.

Useful reading

Charity Grants, 7 Basic Ways to Sustain Your Project

NCVO, How to Achieve Sustainability of Funded Projects

Tools4Dev, How to Write the Sustainability Plan of a Proposal