

Just as a tree depends on its roots to flourish, grantees depend on effective and efficient implementation to maximize their investments. Think about how you will implement your programs well in advance, and when developing your Con Plan, so you can ensure the strategies you develop and the activities you fund can be delivered efficiently and effectively.

In this presentation we will discuss several implementation factors to consider when planning:

Assessing capacity

Consulting with stakeholders

Administering the program

Setting goals

We will wrap up by suggesting resources that can help you plan with implementation in mind.

First, let's explore why it is important to consider implementation when planning.

Grantees depend on several stakeholders to implement their activities. Federal, state, and local municipal departments, community organizations, lenders, developers, and program staff all play key roles in a delivering a successful project. It takes good planning and coordination to make the most of your partners and shared resources.

Similarly, think about the partner and staff capacity you will need to achieve your goals. This includes the ability to deliver programs, administer funds and maintain compliance. Develop strategies that support your strengths and help you build your capacity so that you and your team are prepared.

When you have effective partners and strong staff capacity, your programs operate smoothly, and you have the tools to maximize your investments.

Stakeholders, partners, and your own staff are the roots of the tree which anchor your program.

It's important to design programs that can be operated both efficiently and effectively.

Look at past performance to help you understand your strengths and weaknesses. Avoid funding activities that have high administrative costs and little return on investment.

Find ways to streamline and consolidate functions within and across programs and agencies. To do this, map existing processes, look for problem areas, and identify ways to improve.

Leverage other funding sources and partner resources. Review your funding expenditures and work with partners to ensure efforts are not duplicated.

During the planning process, take a step back and consider both your internal and external capacity to administer and oversee activities.

Internal capacity comes from within the grantee agency or department and includes the staff ability to manage projects and programs, leverage and manage HUD funds, and oversee partners. External capacity is the ability for grantee partners to do the same.

When assessing capacity, look closely at program delivery and oversight, financial management, grant compliance, communication and other systems.

A good starting point for this assessment is to conduct a SWOT Analysis.

A SWOT can help identify your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Identifying these is a first step in understanding how you can design programs that you can implement well.

If you do not have the ability to effectively administer and deliver your activities, find ways to build capacity or scale back activities to those that you can do well. Here are some ideas on how to build capacity.

If you don't have the ability to implement certain activities, create partnerships with complementary organizations.

Design criteria in your Requests for Proposals to seek out high capacity partners that implement programs effectively, leverage resources, and whose activities support your goals.

Work with other municipal departments, local universities and institutions that have the expertise you need.

Another way to build capacity is through technical assistance, such as trainings, webinars, peer-to-peer learning, manuals and other products that may assist the grantee and its partners. There are several resources available on the HUD Exchange to help you build your capacity.

Understanding your capacity can help you develop realistic goals, and realistic goals lead to achievement and reward, helping your program to grow and bear fruit. Setting goals that are out of reach creates frustration, and those that are too easy to achieve can dampen motivation and produce lesser results.

One way to develop realistic goals is to involve stakeholders in the discussion. By doing so, you get the benefits of their input and creative thinking. And you can gain their support as you develop the goals together.

Meaningful and realistic goals are informed by past performance. Goals should reach just beyond what you've been able to achieve in the past, forever raising the bar.

Grantees sometimes forget to celebrate their milestones and accomplishments. Milestones are the building blocks of achievement. When you communicate and celebrate them, you generate energy to do more.

When developing strategies to reach your goals, consider:

Project feasibility, timeline, administrative capacity, funding sources, and activity constraints.

Performance evaluation informs effective strategy development. Identify your strengths and weaknesses and use that information when developing strategies. Evaluate your portfolio of activities as a whole as well as individually, and determine how project implementation played a role in success or failure. Build ongoing program evaluation into your strategy.

Here are some questions you may ask:

Were our expectations for the project reasonable?

What were some of the implementation strengths and challenges of the project?

What would we do differently next time?

Once you have determined which activities you are able to implement effectively and will help you achieve your goals, use an RFP process to solicit them. If an activity has specific implementation challenges, include special requirements in your RFP and ask applicants to address them.

For example, if a grantee often runs into delayed projects because it takes several weeks to clear environmental review, it may want to require that applicants complete the environmental review and identify all environmental issues before submitting an application.

Grantees can improve their programs through informed planning.

Solicit feedback from partners and beneficiaries when evaluating progress and program effectiveness. Two ways to request direct feedback are by asking beneficiaries to complete exit surveys, and by holding focus groups with stakeholders to discuss barriers to progress and how to improve program design.

Communicate regularly with partners and stakeholders during program implementation. Involve stakeholders and partners in trouble shooting issues. Their perspectives and commitment to working with you can be a great resource to your program.

Collaborate with colleagues in other municipal departments, adjacent municipalities, and peer communities. Share experiences. For example, other municipal departments may have experience with a particular partner or may have designed efficient administrative processes that could be replicated.

Seek out resources on the HUD Exchange and on the internet in general. Many universities and nonprofits share material on organizational development and management, team building and other topics.

The Maximizing Investments Toolkit offers several tools to help you take stock of your capacity and improve implementation.

The HUD exchange offers other online resources customized to address the unique challenges and practical considerations of different HUD programs.

HUD also offers direct technical assistance for personalized help.

When developing goals and strategies for the Consolidated Plan, consider how you will implement programs to ensure their success and you understand your capacity to set appropriate goals.

Learn from the past about what works and what doesn't,

identify areas to strengthen capacity,

and work with partners and stakeholder to improve your programs.

In sum, plant the seeds of your program with thoughtful planning and take the time to develop strong implementation roots. This early labor will pay off in the future, as you will have nurtured a healthy and fruitful program that maximizes your investments.