

DO WE NEED TO DE-IMPLEMENT AN EXISTING PROGRAM? A CHECKLIST TO INFORM DECISION MAKING

INTRODUCTION

About This Resource

This checklist is designed to assist administrators of community-based organizations and behavioral-healthcare providers as they make effective, evidence-based decisions about the programs they oversee. During the lifecycle of an intervention, organization, leaders must decide when to start, continue, and conclude the program. At times, removing, pausing, or decreasing an existing program, or de-implementation, may be necessary.

De-implementation is the intentional removal of a program or treatment after it was previously implemented (Niven et al, 2015).

De-implementation may be necessary when: the program is no longer relevant/effective, it lacks community support, it has become financially unsustainable, or the organization has shifted focus to better meet changing community needs.

The decision to end a program is rarely an easy one. This Checklist is a guide designed to assist decision makers as they consider the de-implementation of an evidence-based program or practice. The checklist is organized around the broad categories of:

- Community and program context
- Financial solvency
- Assessing underperformance

How to Use This Checklist

Use this checklist after you have already given thought to whether a program should be de-implemented. The person who completes the checklist should have a

full working knowledge of the program, including the community and organizational context of the program, its effectiveness (e.g., monitoring and evaluation data), and its finances (e.g., cost-effectiveness data). A second person with full working knowledge should also complete the checklist separately. Then, compare and reconcile differences in responses.

This checklist contains 34 statements arranged into 12 themes. Indicate whether each statement reflects the characteristics of the program you are assessing. For each statement, answer either

- **True** for statements that accurately reflect the current characteristics of the program.
- **N/A** for statements that are not currently applicable or relevant to the program, or for which the answer is unknown.
- **False:** For statements that do not accurately reflect the current characteristics of the program.

Once you have completed the checklist, consider how the true and false responses can provide you with insights about the strengths or weaknesses of your program. See the “Interpreting Your Checklist” section below for more information.

Disclaimer

This resource was originally developed for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Agency (SAMHSA) by Development Services Group, Inc. Please direct any questions about this resource to Dr. Brandn Green at bgreen@dsgonline.com.

THE CHECKLIST

Section 1: Community and Program Context

	TRUE	N/A	FALSE
Topic 1: There is community support for the existing program.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
a) There is support for the program from current and potential clients and client family members.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) There is support for the program from area residents.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) There is support for the program from local government and community leaders.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Topic 2: The program is embedded in the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
a) The program is engaged with and serving the target population.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) The program has strong relationships with other area organizations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) The program helps its clients build a network of support in the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Other area organizations currently benefit from the program.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Topic 3: There is still a community need for this program.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
a) a) The program is filling a niche.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) There is minimal/no competition with the program (i.e. no saturation).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) The target population would be negatively impacted if this program did not exist.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Topic 4: The balance of the political/economic factors supporting the program is greater than the political/economic factors preventing the program from succeeding.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Topic 5: The program is achieving its goals and performing well.*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
a) The program has been evaluated by an internal or external evaluator.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) The evaluation results showed that the program is achieving its goals and core objectives.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) The evaluation results pointed to areas of improvement that are manageable.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**If the program is underperforming, complete both sections 2 and 3. If the program is performing well, omit Section 3 from the checklist.*

Section 2: Financial Solvency

TRUE N/A FALSE

Topic 6: An economic analysis (e.g., cost-effectiveness or cost-benefit analysis) of the program was conducted.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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- a) The economic analysis showed that the program is financially solvent.
- b) The economic analysis showed that the program is cost-effective.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Topic 7: The program is currently functioning under or at its budget.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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- a) a) If false, reasonable cuts to expenses can be made to put the program back on budget.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Topic 8: The funding for the program is sustainable.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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- a) There is support for the program from current and potential funders. The organization has assembled a funding plan for the program for the next 10 years.
- b) The program is funded from diverse sources (grants, foundations, donations, fundraising).
- c) The program has staff or a group of volunteers who are qualified and dedicated to securing and maintaining funding for the program.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Section 3: For Underperforming Programs

TRUE N/A FALSE

Topic 9: If the program is in its infancy:

- The program is expected to be performing effectively within a reasonable and defined timeline.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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If the program is a mature program:

- i) The program has a history of performing well and fulfilling goals.
- ii) The program's underperformance has been recent following a long period of success.
- The program is expected to be performing effectively within a reasonable and defined timeframe.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Topic 10: The timeframe in which the program is expected to be performing effectively is realistic and can be achieved given current funding and resources.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Topic 11: The modification needed to allow the program to perform effectively are minor/manageable.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Topic 12: There are no other programs available that produce desired outcomes more effectively.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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INTERPRETING YOUR CHECKLIST

This guide will help you interpret your responses to the checklist. True responses to checklist statements contribute to your decision to continue your program, whereas false responses contribute to your decision to de-implement your program. While no one statement should warrant de-implementation, we encourage you to view the results of your review in total as you make your decision.

Section 1: Community & Program Context

There is community support for your program:

If your organization lacks support from current and potential clients, this should be a red flag. Support from area residents, funders and/or local leaders is also important. While it may be possible to improve buy-in from these stakeholders, the wider your opposition (e.g., from multiple stakeholder groups) versus only one of these groups, the more you may want to consider de-implementation. *Resources: [Nonprofits Integrating Community Engagement Guide](#), see resources listed in the “Conclusion” section.*

The program is embedded in the community:

Successful programs are embedded in the community. While not just one of these sub-statements sufficiently justifies dissolving a program—excluding perhaps Statement 2a—you should assess whether the program can be truly successful without being able to answer true to each of these statements. And, you should craft a detailed plan for achieving each of these statements within a given timeframe. If sub-statement 2d is true, and you are considering dissolving the program, you should work with other programs to find a way to fill the need and minimize negative impacts if the program is dissolved. *Resources: [Nonprofits Integrating Community Engagement Guide](#), [Engagement Toolbox](#).*

There is still a community need for the program: A successful program is one that fills a community need. If the program is not filling a niche in the community, not positively affecting clients or is competing with other programs—especially programs that are more effectively addressing the need—you may want to consider de-implementing the program. *Resources: [Community Toolbox - Assessing Community Needs and Resources](#), [DHHS Compassion Capital Fund - Conducting a Community Assessment Guide](#).*

Political and Economic Factors support the program:

Broader contextual factors (e.g., economic recessions, decline in available funding, changing governmental policies for nonprofits) can impede programs from succeeding. These factors should be weighed along with

the program’s realistic ability to persevere through such barriers when deciding whether to continue a program. *Resources: [National Council for NonProfits - Trends & Policy Issues](#), [Urban Institute Center for Nonprofits and Philanthropy](#).*

The program is achieving goals: If the program is not performing well—based on internal data or evaluation—you should consult the advice below under statements 9–12 for underperforming programs. Note, deciding to de-implement a program can be most effectively done when you have access to monitoring and evaluation data. For monitoring and evaluation resources, consider using the resources that follow. *Resources: [Community Toolbox - Evaluating the Initiative Resources](#), [Center for Nonprofit Excellence - Evaluation Resources](#), [W.K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook](#).*

Section 2: Financial Solvency

The program is financially solvent: Programs whose costs are over budget and have minimal options for decreasing costs and increasing funding may be clear options for de-implementation. Even if a program is functioning under budget, it is important to determine the amount of money spent for each producible outcome. An economic analysis is often appropriate for this. *Resources: [Centers for Disease Control Five Part Webcast on Economic Evaluation](#), [Children’s Bureau - Cost Analysis in Program Evaluation](#).*

Program funding is sustainable: The ability for a program to continue also depends on its ability to maintain funding. Maintaining funding requires long-term planning by designated staff and/or volunteers that, in most cases, should be diversified across sources. *Resources: [Free Management Library Non-profit Fundraising Resources](#), [Venture for Fundraising’s Resource Mobilization Guide](#), [Community Toolbox - Writing a Grant Application Resources](#), [Community Toolbox - Developing a Plan for Financial Sustainability](#).*

Section 3: For Underperforming Programs

Statements 9-12: You should have responded to these statements if your answers to Statement 5 and its sub-statements suggested that the program was underperforming. It is expected that a program in its infancy can take time to develop to the point that it can fulfill its mission. If this is the case, you should create a plan to identify areas for improvement and a strategy for addressing them. If, however, the program is a mature program that has been underperforming for a long period of time, you are likely considering whether the program should move forward. It can also be important to determine whether another program could more effectively produce the desired outcomes. In either case, continuing with the program requires that you can foresee a realistic timeframe that the program can improve with

modifications. *Resources: See resources listed in the "Conclusion" section.*

CONCLUSION

If you decide to de-implement the program: The de-implementation of a program is a process and, when planned and done appropriately, can be an important step in 1) helping to transition clients, staff, and volunteers to other community resources and opportunities and 2) acknowledging the legacy and accomplishments of clients, staff, and volunteers to the program that is being de-implemented. The following resources provide guidance in successfully de-implementing a program. [What to do When Closing the Doors, The American Journal of Evaluation - The Evaluator's Role in Recommending Program Closure.](#)

If you decide to continue the program: The fact that you considered de-implementing the program suggests that the program has sufficient room for improvement. Use the checklist as a guide to determine which modifications or improvements need to be made. The following resources may also be helpful as you make strategic plans to do so: [Tools and Resources for Nonprofits from the National Council of Nonprofits](#), [Free Management Library](#), [Program Sustainability Assessment Tool from the Center for Public Health Systems Science](#), [Sustainability Model and Guide from the Institute for Innovation and Improvement](#), [Strategies for Sustaining Successful Community-Based Programs from American Academy of Pediatrics](#), [Center for Nonprofit Excellence](#), [Public Health Improvement Center.](#)

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