



National Institute of Nursing Research Centers of Excellence: A logic model for sustainability, leveraging resources, and collaboration to accelerate cross-disciplinary science

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ABSTRACT

The National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR) Centers of Excellence program is a catalyst enabling institutions to develop infrastructure and administrative support for creating cross-disciplinary teams that bring multiple strategies and expertise to bear on common areas of science. Centers are increasingly collaborative with campus partners and reflect an integrated team approach to advance science and promote the development of scientists in these areas. The purpose of this paper is to present the NINR Logic Model for Center Sustainability. The components of the logic model were derived from the presentations and robust discussions at the 2013 NINR center directors' meeting focused on best practices for leveraging resources and collaboration as methods to promote center sustainability. Collaboration through development and implementation of cross-disciplinary research teams is critical to accelerate the generation of new knowledge for solving fundamental health problems. Sustainability of centers as a long-term outcome beyond the initial funding can be enhanced by thoughtful planning of inputs, activities, and leveraging resources across multiple levels.

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¹ Center directors who were present during the meeting April 9, 2013 (Table 2).

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Introduction

The National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR) Centers of Excellence program was developed more than 20 years ago to stimulate collaborative scientific efforts through the creation of research teams that incorporate investigators from disparate, yet synergistic, disciplines. The centers are aligned with the strategic plan of NINR (<https://www.ninr.nih.gov/sites/www.ninr.nih.gov/files/ninr-strategic-plan-2011.pdf>). Center funding supports strategic areas including symptom science, self-management, wellness and the underserved, and end-of-life care. Input from each discipline composing the team is critical. Since 2006, NINR has funded five developmental (P20) and 13 core (P30) centers (Table 1). The centers provide infrastructure and support for cross-disciplinary collaborations and a team approach to accelerate the science in their specialized areas while expanding research capacity by providing training opportunities for students, postdoctoral fellows, and junior research faculty (Dunbar-Jacob, McCloskey, Weglicki, & Grady, 2014; Grady, 2009).

The purpose of this article is to present the NINR Logic Model for Center Sustainability. This logic model provides a theoretical framework for developing, implementing, and evaluating the short-, medium-, and long-term impact of the centers individually and the NINR centers program collectively. The NINR Logic Model for Center Sustainability and examples of how centers can or have used model components to maximize growth and sustainability are described. The information may provide guidance for other scientists who wish to develop and sustain a center or plan for the sustainability of a center program, such as those funded by the NINR.

Logic modeling is a method for identifying the components, processes, and outcomes expected from a program. It is a way to describe a theory of action or a road map for how a particular program is developed; identify and define program activities; describe how the parts fit together and the relationships among the components; and, most importantly, elaborate on methods of achieving the impact and outcomes (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.; Frechtling, 2007; University of Wisconsin-Extension, n.d.). Logic models are supported by the evaluation theory including approaches from a practical participatory, values engaged, and emergent realist perspective (Frye & Hemmer, 2012; Hansen, Alkin, & Wallace, 2013). All theoretical approaches include context, activities, consequences/effects, assumptions, and external factors. Logic models incorporate all of the these aspects and, when thoughtfully developed, can identify gaps or inconsistencies in one or more of the components, processes, or expected outcomes that could jeopardize the successful implementation,

completion, and sustainability of a center. Logic models have been described as appropriate for home health (Bucher, 2010), practice-based research networks (Hayes, Parchman, & Howard, 2011), and community engagement in the Clinical and Translation Science Award (CTSA) Program (Eder, Carter-Edwards, Hurd, Rumala, & Wallerstein, 2013)¹. The logic model presented in this article was developed to emphasize the intentionality of the multilevel planning needed to leverage resources in order to achieve sustainability of a center.

Methods

The writing team, which included representatives of the center directors (Table 2), developed the logic model from the content provided at the 2013 Centers Directors Meeting on “Sustainability, Leveraging Resources, and Collaboration in NINR Centers.” The meeting provided a broad perspective from the presentations of invited speakers, interdisciplinary colleagues, NINR scientists and leaders, CTSA representatives (<http://www.ncats.nih.gov/research/cts/ctsa/ctsa.html>), and center directors and center scientists. Meeting participants engaged in interactive breakout sessions that focused on specific topics germane to establishing center sustainability. The posters and abstracts presented at the meeting provided more details. Some centers provided additional materials, such as publications (Heitkemper et al., 2008; Inouye et al., 2011). The writing team reviewed each of these documents to identify the following categories and themes and determined that these were consistent with the main components of a logic model: inputs, outputs (activities and participation), outcomes, and impact. Assumptions and external factors, also components of a logic model, were gleaned from the documents. The writing team reviewed multiple drafts of the logic model until a consensus was reached. After this process, center directors who attended the 2013 meeting reviewed and commented on the draft.

Results and Discussion

The NINR Logic Model for Center Sustainability (Figure 1) was developed to organize the many suggestions and examples identified throughout the center directors’ meeting. Leveraging resources and

¹ Logic models have components and processes developed from and consistent with evaluation theory approaches including practical participatory, value-engaged, or emergent realistic perspectives. Centers must include planned inputs and activities that are aimed at leveraging resources and achieving sustainability.

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