

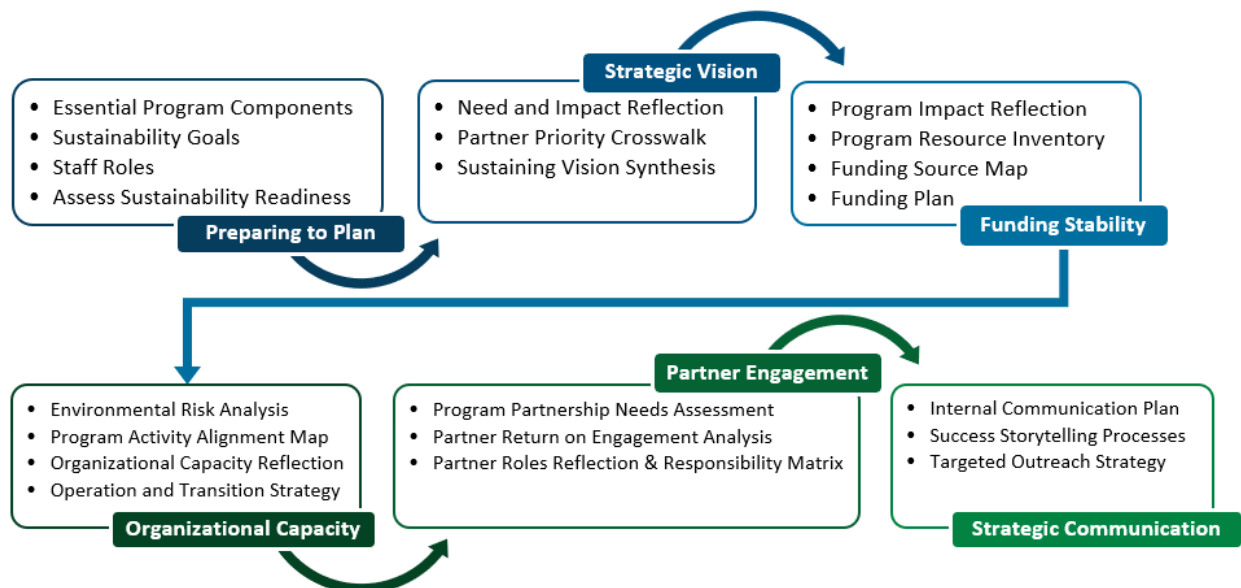
Sustainability Readiness Toolkit

A Roadmap for Sustainability Planning

Sustainability extends the impact of a specific program by supporting the continuation of critical and effective program practices beyond the period of initial funding and implementation. Like the approach used for the initial program design, a comprehensive approach to planning for sustainability is strategic, collaborative, and adaptable. This resource draws on sustainability frameworks and research identified in the *Beyond Implementation: Planning for Sustainability* brief and includes actionable tools to support a strategic and comprehensive approach to sustainability planning for RETAIN grantees. The tools are designed to be used to support initial sustainability planning activities or to enhance existing planning activities. The infographic below outlines the different steps in sustainability planning and the planning activities associated with each step.

About this Resource

The **Sustainability Readiness Toolkit** was developed to accompany the *Beyond Implementation: Planning for Sustainability* brief and to support RETAIN states in the process of developing a vision and supporting strategies to sustain their stay-at-work/return-to-work (SAW/RTW) programs.



How to Use This Toolkit

The road map below features a bulleted list of category-specific tools to support sustainability planning. If your team is at the beginning of the planning process, begin with the tools under the *Preparing to Plan* section and then advance to the subsequent sections. If your team has already begun planning for RETAIN program sustainability, the Sustainability Readiness Self-Assessment tool will help you identify opportunities to enhance your planning efforts by category.

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Preparing to Plan for Sustainability

Essential Program Components

Preparing to plan for sustainability is essential for laying the groundwork for effective long-term planning and will help the program navigate challenges. When preparing to plan for sustainability, the first step is to work with your state team to determine what components of your program need to be sustained. Determining the essential parts of your program may help to:

- Clarify sustainability goals and objectives.
- Align stakeholders to the program’s purpose, goals, and expectations.
- Guide the planning and implementation of sustainability efforts.
- Guide the monitoring and evaluation of sustainability efforts.

When determining what components of your program to sustain, your team should first answer key questions on what sustainability might look like for your program. Answer the reflection questions that follow in the template below. Consider how your answers inform your understanding of sustainability.

Sustainability reflection questions	Answers
What core program components and services are integral to the program?	
What is the capacity of the program to maintain its operations and services?	
What is the program’s capacity to adapt to changing circumstances (e.g., changes in funding, the labor market, or policy)?	
Who are the external partners and collaborators that can enhance the impact of sustainability?	

Sustainability Goals

After you have established a definition of sustainability, use it to inform your sustainability goals. Start by revisiting your definition to ensure that it captures the key principles that are most important to sustainability. Then use your definition to identify key areas or dimensions that are essential to sustainability. Reflect on the importance of each of the areas you have identified and determine which areas require the most attention. For each key area you identify, develop specific, measurable, achievable, and time-bound goals, otherwise known as SMART goals. Use the template below to get started.

S	Specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What components of our program do we want to sustain? • When does this need to be achieved? 	
M	Measurable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What data will we use to track progress toward our sustainability goals? • How will we measure the impact of our services? 	
A	Achievable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the goal achievable? • How will I know when the goal is achieved? 	
R	Relevant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the goal essential to the program's success? 	
T	Time-Bound	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long will it take to accomplish this goal? • When should I start working toward this goal? 	

University of California. (2017). *Smart goals: A how to guide*.

<https://med.stanford.edu/content/dam/sm/s-spire/documents/How-to-write-SMART-Goals-v2.pdf>

Staff Roles

Once your sustainability definition and goals have been established, identify what role staff will play in your sustainability efforts. Use the template below to identify how the roles and responsibilities of key staff intersect with your sustainability goals.


Name	Role description	Responsibilities		Sustainability goals alignment
		Primary	Secondary	
				<p><i>What step or steps in the sustainability process do their responsibilities address?</i></p>
				<p><i>How does their role align with your sustainability goals?</i></p>
				<p><i>In what ways, if any, does their role need to be adapted to address sustainability?</i></p>

Sustainability Readiness Self-Assessment

After your team has finished planning preparations, self-assess your readiness level in each of the following sustainability planning steps. Use the results of your self-assessment to identify additional tools you may need to strengthen your planning efforts.


Strategic Planning

Strategic planning helps to establish a shared vision and collaborative approach to sustainability.

	Readiness level		
	Exploratory <i>We have not yet started or are just starting to explore.</i>	In development <i>We are currently in the process of developing.</i>	Prepared <i>Yes, we are fully prepared in this area.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have analyzed the program areas we need to expand or narrow for sustainability. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have a strong understanding of how our partners can support our vision of sustainability. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have established a clear vision of sustainability in collaboration with our partners. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>


Create Funding Stability

Funding stability means having consistent financial support to sustain your program.

	Readiness level		
	Exploratory <i>We have not yet started or are just starting to explore.</i>	In development <i>We are currently in the process of developing.</i>	Prepared <i>Yes, we are fully prepared in this area.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have identified the aspects of the program that are most important to sustainability. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have assessed the value of our program's resources. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have considered ways to diversify our funding sources (e.g., federal, state, and private funding sources). 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have developed a funding plan based on our vision of sustainability. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Organizational Capacity

Organizational capacity means having the support and resources necessary to sustain your program's functioning.

	Readiness level		
	Exploratory <i>We have not yet started or are just starting to explore.</i>	In Development <i>We are currently in the process of developing.</i>	Prepared <i>Yes, we are fully prepared in this area.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have assessed both the risks and opportunities (e.g., political, economic, social) that may affect program sustainability. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have evaluated staff and partner roles to identify duplication of effort. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have evaluated our strengths and limitations in consideration of anticipated changes. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have identified transition needs and skill gaps across key staff roles. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>


Ongoing Partner Engagement

Ongoing partner engagement means involving key partners consistently and continuously to support the anticipation of and planning around sustainability issues.

	Readiness level		
	Exploratory <i>We have not yet started or are just starting to explore.</i>	In Development <i>We are currently in the process of developing.</i>	Prepared <i>Yes, we are fully prepared in this area.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have matched potential partners to our program needs. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have considered how partner benefits or challenges may be affected by program sustainability changes. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have evaluated our strengths and limitations in consideration of anticipated sustainability changes. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have identified transition needs and skill gaps across key staff roles. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

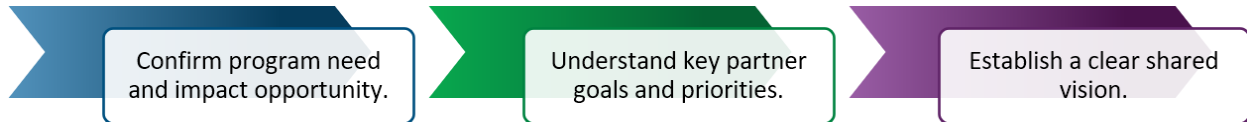
Strategic Communication

Strategic communication means effectively communicating with stakeholders and the public about the program to help raise awareness and establish buy-in.

	Readiness level		
	Exploratory <i>We have not yet started or are just starting to explore.</i>	In Development <i>We are currently in the process of developing.</i>	Prepared <i>Yes, we are fully prepared in this area.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have developed a plan for both internal and external communication efforts. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our communications are tailored to specific audiences and stakeholders. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have developed ways to highlight and demonstrate program impact with our stakeholders (e.g., success stories). 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Sustainability Readiness Toolkit: Strategic Vision

Program partners and champions need to have a collaborative understanding of what program sustainability success looks like as well as common messaging for those efforts.



Needs and Impact Reflection



Confirm program need and impact opportunity. Reflect on program background and context to evaluate the original purpose of the program including the stated vision, challenges to be solved, and the intended beneficiaries. Look for areas where the need and opportunity are either expanded or narrowed through the sustained program.

Original program	Sustained program
<i>What is the stated vision/mission of your RETAIN program as it was originally developed?</i>	<i>As your RETAIN program is sustained, how is the vision/mission expanded or narrowed?</i>
<i>What problem/challenge does your RETAIN program seek to solve?</i>	<i>As your RETAIN program is sustained, how has the problem/challenge area of focus changed?</i>
<i>What led to the development of your RETAIN program?</i>	<i>How have those factors changed?</i>
<i>Who directly benefits from your RETAIN program and how? Who indirectly benefits from your RETAIN program and how?</i>	<i>How might program beneficiaries change in the sustained program? What program outcomes will reflect benefits?</i>

Partner Priority Crosswalk



Understand key partner goals and priorities. Analyze the scope of partner missions and supporting strategies to identify program points of intersection and potential resource-sharing opportunities.

Key partner organization	Partner's vision statement	Supporting strategic goals	Partner implementation mechanisms (policies, work groups, etc.)
<i>Example: State workforce agency</i>	<i>All state citizens will have access to credentials/skills for career opportunities and employers will have access to the talent needed to thrive.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>High school credential target total of X%</i> • <i>Target labor market engagement percentage of X%</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>State/local workforce development boards and job centers</i> • <i>Industry or strategy-specific task forces or working groups (e.g., youth workforce committee, health care workforce task force),</i> • <i>Supporting policies for strategic vision (e.g., supportive services, Labor Demand Occupations list)</i>

Sustaining Vision Synthesis



Establish a clear shared vision. Identify common goals across key program partners to establish a shared vision for program success.

Themes	Notes
<i>What common words and/or goals are evident in partner vision statements?</i>	
<i>Which strategic goals can support or strengthen efforts across partners?</i>	
<i>Which goals or priorities may conflict with each other?</i>	
<i>What is the new stated vision/mission of the program?</i>	

Sustainability Readiness Toolkit: Creating Funding Stability

Understanding the cost and value of program services can support the identification of additional partners and funding opportunities to sustain the program through changes to funding streams.



Program Impact Reflection



Evaluate which aspects of the program to sustain. Consider specific innovations, strategies, and approaches that are central to the vision of your RETAIN program. Note the results of these innovations, strategies, and approaches and evidence of their success. Identify the resources needed to continue or expand them.

Key innovation, strategy, or approach <i>What is the innovation?</i>	Rationale/evidence of effectiveness <i>Why is this innovation significant? What was the result of the innovation?</i>	Sustaining impact priority level <i>Will you keep it as is, make modifications, or eliminate it?</i>	Resources needed to sustain <i>What is needed to continue or expand this innovation?</i>
<i>Example: Return-to-Work (RTW) Coordinator case management support for patients</i>	<i>Streamlined point of contact to resources and coordinated medical/workforce services. Data on reduced RTW time compared to the national average.</i>	<i>High priority—keep role responsibilities as is but modify caseload targets and reporting structure.</i>	<i>Financial resources for salaries/benefits, access to health records and relationships with key partners, and physical resources for the office.</i>

Program Resource Inventory



Assess the value of program resources. Program resources may include existing marketing contracts or partnerships, software licenses such as customer relationship management systems, organizational memberships (such as Chambers of Commerce or professional associations), and staff equipment. Attention should be paid to the responsibility for fulfilling ongoing program resource needs to carry out the goals of the program.

Resource description	Function	Condition/ownership	Cost/value notes	Funding source(s) for this resource
<i>Example: Customer Relationship Management data system</i>	<i>Data system to log patient meeting notes, employer contacts, and supporting reports</i>	<i>Annual license paid by health care partner</i>	<i>\$250 for individual licenses, \$150 for 5–10 licenses</i>	<i>Healthcare partner (existing group license contract)</i>

Funding Source Map



Diversify funding sources. Inventory potential sources of funding for grant sustainability including federal, state, and private sources of funding. Leveraging multiple funding sources of different types can overcome specific funding source limitations or restrictions (e.g., restrictions on use for staff salaries).

Name of funding source	Type of funding	Leading organization/owner of funding stream	Funding timelines	Notes on funding source parameters (cost limitations, eligibility restrictions)	Strategies that can be supported by this funding source
<i>Example: Foundation grant</i>	<i>Competitive grant</i>	<i>Local workforce area + health care partner</i>	<i>2-year grant</i>	<i>Grant requires list of required partners cannot cover infrastructure costs</i>	<i>Staff cost for RTW coordinator, program outreach/recruitment</i>

Funding Plan



Develop a funding plan. Based on your shared vision for program sustainability, establish a funding plan with short- and long-term funding goals to maintain key program components. Identify opportunities to adapt to trends, new funding opportunities, and unexpected budget shortfalls.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
	Amount of funding			
Funding source 1				
Funding source 2				
Funding source 3				
Funding source 4				

Strategies and activities to be sustained	Resources needed to sustain	Potential funding sources
<i>Example: 5 RTW Coordinator staff</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Staff salary/benefits 2. Office space for staff 3. Shared software licenses with health care/workforce partners 4. Training and professional development resources 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shared cost across state agency, local workforce partner, and employer partners 2. Office space—donated by health care partners in local clinics 3. Workforce partners will pay for workforce staff technology licenses, and health care partners will pay for health care licenses 4. Training and professional development costs will be added/shared to salary/benefits

Sustainability Readiness Toolkit: Maintaining Organizational Capacity

Organizational capacity may be affected by succession or transitions in the life cycle of the program. Understanding the critical program activities for each functional area can help a program to sustain through external environmental changes and streamline roles and responsibilities over time.



Environmental Risk Analysis



Anticipate change risks and opportunities. Consider potential change factors that may affect the sustainability of your RETAIN program. These include both risks and opportunities to access new resources or expand the scope of your program’s impact.

Sustainability risks may include risks in partner or champion support of the program goals or access to referral sources for meeting enrollment performance outcomes. Changes may also create additional opportunities for a program, such as accessing a new geographic area or demographic population to be served.

- **Political** factors may include elections, leadership transitions, and policy changes.
- **Economic** factors may include economic trends, staff layoffs, and economic development.
- **Technological** factors may include data system shifts and data sharing shifts.
- **Structural** shifts may include agency reorganization, the addition or removal of partners, and changes in the approach to service delivery.
- **Workforce** shifts may include staff transitions, labor shortages, and licensure requirements.

Potential change	Likelihood of change <i>(certain, likely, possible, unlikely, rare)</i>	Impact severity potential <i>(minor, marginal, critical, significant)</i>	Impact risks	Impact opportunities
<i>Example: State workforce transition to new agency</i>	<i>Likely</i>	<i>Critical</i>	<i>Staff role reorganization, delays in fiscal processing</i>	<i>New partnership access to additional state programs and funding streams</i>

Program Activity Alignment Map



Crosswalk program activities by functional area. Stabilize your RETAIN program operations by assessing each program activity according to functional program area and goals. Evaluate staff and partner responsibilities to identify potential duplication of effort or gaps that may be created by sustainability transitions.

Program goal	Program functional area	Program activity	Staff responsible
<i>Example: Reduce return-to-work barriers by making support services available</i>	<i>Local workforce board One-Stop system partners and community-based organizations</i>	<i>Referrals made for partner services through the local One-Stop Career Center</i>	<i>Local job center case manager or partner program</i>

Organizational Capacity Reflection



Evaluate organizational capacity needs based on expected changes. Reflect on the program’s capacity strengths and limitations and the anticipated changes. Identify elements of the program structure to continue, modify, or streamline based on new needs.

Original program	Notes for sustained program
Coordination: <i>What has worked well regarding the management and coordination of the program? What could be improved?</i>	
Management: <i>What management functions will be required to sustain prioritized activities? What is the best strategy for managing those functions?</i>	
Staffing structure: <i>What expertise is needed to continue the activities we have prioritized to sustain?</i>	

Operation and Transition Strategy

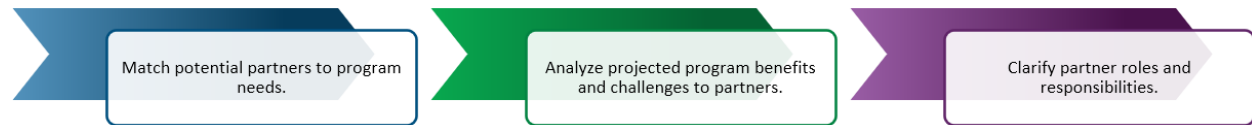


Align key roles and responsibilities. Make an inventory of key staff roles, skill sets, assigned duties or job functions, and regular task responsibilities, including key, recurring deliverables. Crosswalk key internal staff operational roles across the program team to identify transition needs or skill gaps. Update staffing plans accordingly.

Name and role	Skill sets	Assigned duties/job functions	Regular task responsibilities <i>(E.g., reports, deliverables, committees)</i>
<i>Example: Jane Doe, Project Director</i>	<i>Strategic vision, project management, staff supervision, business engagement</i>	<i>Liaise with the governor's office and cabinet leadership, provide program updates, hire and supervise program staff, implement strategic vision</i>	<i>Staff performance management (annually) Quarterly program updates to federal office and state council Annual performance report, fiscal audit, etc.</i>

Sustainability Readiness Toolkit: Ongoing Partner Engagement

Sustainability planning is an opportunity to reassess and affirm the program’s value to current and potential partners.



Program Partnership Needs Assessment



Match potential partners to program needs. Use your RETAIN program’s vision and goals to identify specific needs, which may include partner areas of expertise, access to networks or communities, or specific resources. Use the list of needs to identify potential partners that may be able to fill those needs.

Program goal	Need based on program goal (<i>expertise, network, resource, etc.</i>)	Potential partner (past, current, future)	Partner’s expertise, skills, and resources
<i>Example: Provide employers with RTW/SAW support strategies</i>	<i>Expertise in reasonable accommodations and assessment, employer engagement</i>	<i>Vocational Rehabilitation</i>	<i>Training and expertise in serving individuals with disabilities</i>

Partner Return on Engagement Analysis



Analyze projected program benefits and challenges to partners. Consider strategies to mitigate challenges to enhance ongoing engagement efforts and expand mutual benefits for both partners and your program.

Partner	Program benefits to partner	Program challenges for partner
<i>Example: Community-based workforce training partner</i>	<i>Conduct outreach and raise awareness of issues/resources, strengthen partnerships with employers</i>	<i>Limited staff capacity to support delivery of program services, program service area limited to four counties</i>

Partner Roles and Responsibilities



Clarify partner roles and responsibilities. Consider types of partners based on the levels of engagement and program support. Use program goals to outline key activities and to establish a lead, accountable, consulted, and informed partner roles and responsibilities, otherwise known as the RACI Matrix. Document your processes for sharing activity progress updates across partners.

Partner Role Reflection

Partner Roles	Notes for sustained program
Decision makers: <i>Who are the key decision makers and who will be the key decision makers when the grant ends?</i>	
Champions: <i>Who are the visible or external champions and who are the behind-the-scenes champions?</i>	
Beneficiaries: <i>Who is not involved but will be affected by changes to the program? How can they contribute to or benefit from the work?</i>	
Critics: <i>Who may have concerns or challenges to future program sustainability plans?</i>	

Partner Responsibility Matrix or RACI Matrix

Description of program goal and supporting activity			
Lead partner(s) and responsibilities	Accountable partner(s) and responsibilities	Consulted partner(s) and responsibilities	Informed partner(s) and responsibilities

Notes on the timeline and processes for sharing updates on progress.

Sustainability Readiness Toolkit: Leveraging Strategic Communication

Aligned communication about the program across partners that is tailored to the target audience can expand capacity for sustaining the program.



Internal Communication Plan



Support strong communication between internal staff and partners. Document information that will be shared internally with staff and partners on a regular basis. Identify clear messages and actions needed and develop clear processes for staff ownership of deliverables, frequency, and methods for sharing information.

Information to be shared	Staff and partners to inform	Message and action items needed (e.g., review, approve, provide feedback, implement change, share)	Processes for sharing information (e.g., responsible staff, frequency, method of communication)
<i>Example: Expanded participant eligibility criteria</i>	<i>All program partners, especially frontline case managers who refer participants</i>	<i>Update program partner understanding of program eligibility and promote this information with internal networks through their communication channels</i>	<i>Send individual email to each partner, include an update in monthly network newsletter, present at quarterly board meetings</i>

Success Storytelling Processes



Showcase program success in your sustainability messaging. Use specific examples of your program’s success, such as participant or employer profiles, for sustainability impact campaigns. Highlight key program benefits for target audiences and share data that illustrate the positive impacts and outcomes of the program.

Program success or highlight	Target audience	Campaign timeline	Resources needed
<i>Example: Self-employed participant success story</i>	<i>Self-employed workers</i>	<i>October–November 2024</i>	<i>Testimonial video clip, photo, and language for social media post, written blog post</i>

Targeted Outreach Strategy



Tailor outreach strategies and messaging to target audiences. Craft communication strategies with clear messages and goals for tracking effectiveness.

Target audience	Communication channels	Call to action	Performance targets
<i>Example: Human Resources professionals</i>	<i>SHRM conference and newsletter, one-page FAQ resource</i>	<i>Refer ill/injured employees to the program</i>	<i>Reach 30 organizations, schedule five meetings, and receive 10 referrals</i>