



The Community Health Worker (CHW) Program Sustainability Compass

July 2026



INTRODUCTION

The Community Health Worker (CHW) Program Sustainability Compass, adapted from NACCHO and Umemba Health's Community Health Worker (CHW) Program Sustainability Assessment Tool, and the accompanied best practice guidance is designed to help local health departments assess and strengthen the development, sustainability, impact, and reach of their CHW programs. The tool focuses on assessing organizational and operational best practices that support long-term program success, including leadership support, partnerships, organizational capacity, evaluation, strategic planning, and funding stability.

This tool is intended to facilitate discussion among CHW program staff, organizational leaders, CHWs, and community partners. CHW program teams are encouraged to complete the assessment collaboratively and use the results to identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities for improvement. If you are still in the initial stages of developing your CHW program, we encourage you to use our CHW Implementation Plan template to get started and return to this tool when you are ready to assess your progress after implementation.

INSTRUCTIONS

To start, gather those on your team responsible for carrying out or supporting the existing CHW program. This might include program leads, program support, CHWs, or community partners. Together, use the questions below to rate and score your program. Allow enough time to discuss each domain item and its response items. It is possible that you might need to complete this assessment over more than one scheduled meeting, especially if there are differing team perspectives to work through. To uncover these, you might consider having each team member score the program individually and then focus on where differences are most stark, using the probes. The probes will help you deepen your analysis of the program through a more shared critical evaluation. Use [this resource](#) from the Community Toolbox to support your facilitation of these dialogues during the assessment. The domains covered in the Sustainability Compass are:

Domain 1: Leadership Support

Domain 2: Partnerships

Domain 3: Organizational Capacity

Domain 4: Program Evaluation

Domain 5: Strategic Planning

Domain 6: Funding Stability



Domain 1: Leadership Support

This domain assesses the degree of internal and external champion support for your CHW program.

As you respond to the scale below, discuss the following prompts to help build a shared picture of your program:

1. Who are your organizational champions and advocates? In what ways do they advocate (or have they advocated) for the program?
2. Describe the leadership support—or lack thereof—that exists within the organization. Include internal existing policies or recent or impending internal policy changes that support or impede the program’s sustainability.
3. Describe the leadership support—or lack thereof—that exists outside of the organization. Include external existing policies or recent or impending external policy changes that support or impede the program’s sustainability.

Resource: As you continue to reflect on the level of leadership support your CHW program has, consider how you can strengthen that support the Gaining Leadership Buy-in for Organizational Change in Health Care resource from Harvard Medical School on gaining leadership buy-in for new programs.

Leadership Support: Internal and external champions support the program.	RESPONSE CATEGORIES						
	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Slightly Disagree	4 Neither Agree or Disagree	5 Slightly Agree	6 Agree	7 Strongly Agree
Our leadership visibly champions our CHW program by actively communicating support and pushing for its continued investment.							
Our CHW program goals are aligned with our organization's strategic priorities.							
Our leadership allocates time and resources to sustain our CHW program.							
Decision-makers can clearly articulate the role, value, and impact of CHWs within the organization and community							



Domain 2: Partnerships

This domain assesses the degree to which your CHW program has managed to cultivate relationships with different partners in the community – including community members, networks, or organizations.

As you respond to the scale below, discuss the following prompts to help build a shared picture of your program:

1. What organizations or individuals are invested in the success of the program? Why?
2. How do you see partner organizations or community members contributing to the sustainability of your program’s efforts?
3. How important is it to have community champions involved with or committed to the program?

Resource: As you continue to reflect on the partners in your CHW program network, consider how you can strengthen that support using the [Partnership Assessment Tool for Health \(PATH\)](#). This tool will help you to maximize the impact of the partnerships that you do have.

Partnerships: Cultivating connections between the program and partners.	RESPONSE CATEGORIES						
	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Slightly Disagree	4 Neither Agree or Disagree	5 Slightly Agree	6 Agree	7 Strongly Agree
Our CHW program has strong relationships with community-based organizations.							
CHWs are integrated into community coalitions or health networks.							
Our CHW program regularly engages community partners for feedback and collaboration.							
We have formal agreements with external partners (MOU, MOA, contracts) supporting CHW roles.							

Domain 3: Organizational Capacity

This domain assesses the degree and quality of the organizational capacity of your CHW program, including resources and staffing.

As you respond to the scale below, discuss the following prompts to help build a shared picture of your program:

1. Describe the internal support and resources you currently have for your program.
2. Describe the strengths and weaknesses you see in terms of the organizational capacity to maintain your program.
3. Describe the formal policies or structures that support the use of CHWs across departments.

Resource: As you continue to reflect on your CHW program infrastructure, consider how you might strengthen it using the [Building a Community Health Worker](#) toolkit, which includes a range of best practices for developing CHW programs.

Organizational Capacity: Having the internal infrastructure and operational resources needed to effectively manage your program and its activities.	RESPONSE CATEGORIES						
	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Slightly Disagree	4 Neither Agree or Disagree	5 Slightly Agree	6 Agree	7 Strongly Agree
There are dedicated staff to manage and support CHWs.							
CHWs receive ongoing training, supervision, and professional development.							
Policies and procedures are in place to guide CHW activities.							
Our organization collects and uses data to inform CHW activities.							

DOMAIN 4: PROGRAM EVALUATION

This domain assesses the quality of your program evaluation methods and their ability to drive changes and other improvements to your CHW program.

As you respond to the scale below, discuss the following prompts to help build a shared picture of your program:

1. Describe the documented reports or findings that demonstrate how well the program is doing and where there are challenges or opportunities for improvement.
2. Describe how the program has used evaluation findings to strengthen the program and its sustainability.
3. Who have you shared your evaluation results with?
4. What are your program's outcomes to date? Consider the 5Rs: Results, Revenue, Retention, Referrals, Reviews (or testimonials)

Resource: As you continue to reflect on your program evaluation methods, consider using the [Measuring What Matters In Public Health](#) resource or this example of [Performance Measures for CHW Programs](#) from Umemba Health.

Program Evaluation: Assessing your program to inform planning and documenting results.	RESPONSE CATEGORIES						
	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Slightly Disagree	4 Neither Agree or Disagree	5 Slightly Agree	6 Agree	7 Strongly Agree
Your CHW program has clearly defined metrics and goals.							
CHW outcomes (e.g., outreach, impact) are regularly tracked.							
Evaluation findings are used to improve program design and delivery.							
Our CHW program shares success stories and data with key partners and leadership.							

Domain 5: Strategic Planning

This domain assesses your strategic plan and the approach you take to developing it.

As you respond to the scale below, discuss the following prompts to help build a shared picture of your program:

1. What time frame does your program's strategic plan cover?
2. Who is a part of the planning process?
3. How often will you review your strategic plan? Change and update it?
4. How will you measure the impact of your strategic plan? Will you use a balanced scorecard, SWOT analysis, or something else?

Resource: As you continue to reflect on your strategic planning efforts, consider using the below resources from NACCHO or:

- [Developing a Local Health Department Strategic Guide: A How-To Guide](#) by NACCHO
- [E-Learning Course on Strategic Planning](#) by NACCHO
- [Developing a Strategic Plan](#) by Community Toolbox
- [SWOT Analysis](#)
- [PESTLE Analysis](#)

Strategic Planning: Using processes that guide your program's direction, goals, and strategies.	RESPONSE CATEGORIES						
	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Slightly Disagree	4 Neither Agree or Disagree	5 Slightly Agree	6 Agree	7 Strongly Agree
Our CHW program has a clear sustainability plan including funding, staffing, partnerships, evaluation, and operational priorities.							
Short and long-term goals are developed and reviewed regularly.							
CHWs are involved in planning and decision-making processes.							
Our program uses data and trends to plan for the future.							

Domain 6: Funding Stability

This domain assesses the funding for your CHW program and your ability to sustain it in the long term.

As you respond to the scale below, discuss the following prompts to help build a shared picture of your program:

1. Describe the current funding situation and when the funding ends.
2. How will the program continue to be funded after your grant funding ends?
3. Describe your efforts to obtain funding, past, and future.
4. Describe how you foresee the work of this program continuing if you are not able to secure additional funding.

Resource: As you continue to reflect on your funding, consider using the resources below from NACCHO:

- [Reimbursement Strategies for Employers of Community Health Workers](#)
- [Pay for Success Toolkit](#)
- [Collaborative Financing to Improve Sustainability](#)

Funding Stability: Establishing a consistent financial base for your program.	RESPONSE CATEGORIES						
	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Slightly Disagree	4 Neither Agree or Disagree	5 Slightly Agree	6 Agree	7 Strongly Agree
Our CHW program has diversified funding sources.							
Budgeting for CHW roles is built into core operations.							
Our program pursues grants or reimbursement opportunities.							
There is a plan to maintain or grow funding over time.							

SCORE INTERPRETATION AND BEST PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Add the combined points from each domain and use the criteria below to score your CHW program for sustainability. Your program will either score as underdeveloped, emerging, or strong. Depending on where your program falls, we include some best practice resources you can use to strengthen or sustain the quality of your program.

Underdeveloped (24–83)

Interpretation: The program faces significant challenges in one or more sustainability areas. Core systems and support for CHWs are likely underdeveloped or inconsistent.

Best Practice Guidance:

- Conduct a root cause analysis to identify structural barriers.
- Prioritize leadership engagement and organizational commitment.
- Consider technical assistance or peer mentoring from established CHW programs.
- Start with one domain (e.g., Leadership Support or Funding Stability) for focused improvement before moving on to the next.



Resource: Use this [Root Cause Analysis Toolkit](#) or a [Fishbone Diagram](#) to critically identify what may be holding your program back. Similar tools can also be found [here in Phase II, Step 5 of NACCHO's Mobilizing Action through Planning and Partnerships \(MAPP\) 2.0 handbook](#). NACCHO can also serve as a resource for connecting you with other health departments for peer support.

Emerging (84–125)

Interpretation: The program has some foundational elements of sustainability in place but may lack consistency, depth, or cross-domain integration.

Best Practice Guidance:

- Strengthen areas with lower domain scores by developing action plans.
- Document and formalize partnerships, funding strategies, and program evaluation plans.
- Improve internal communication around the CHW program's impact and needs.
- Begin planning for longer-term strategic growth.

Resource: To work on taking your CHW program to the next level, consider using NACCHO's [Measuring What Matters in Public Health](#) resource, a guide to improve performance management.

Strong (126-168)

Interpretation: The program is well-positioned for sustainability. A strong infrastructure, leadership support, and strategic planning are evident.

Best Practice Guidance:

- Maintain and continuously improve across all domains.
- Share your model and lessons learned with others in the field.
- Invest in professional development and leadership pathways for CHWs.
- Advocate for policy or funding mechanisms that institutionalize CHW roles.

Resource: Integrating people with lived experience (PWLE) and CHW training are both proven best practices in the most successful CHW programs. If you have not already, consider fortifying your CHW program with Community Commons' [Engaging People with Lived Experience](#) toolkit and Umemba Health's [CHW training program](#).

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