

Financially Sustaining Behavioral Health–Criminal Justice Programs

Jurisdictions across the country are implementing behavioral health-criminal justice programs to help minimize justice involvement among people with mental illnesses and substance use disorders and address their distinct needs. These programs can look different for various communities but often include law enforcement-led programs like **co-responder teams**, crisis system responses such as **crisis stabilization units**, or community-based treatment programs focused on reentry that all provide critical treatment and supportive services. However, the ongoing costs of implementing such programs can present challenges to long-term operation. This brief outlines key strategies and tips to financially sustaining behavioral health-criminal justice programs. Together, these approaches can help set programs up for long-lasting success.

Establishing a clear mission and goals

To help sustain your behavioral health-criminal justice program, it is important to first establish clear objectives (i.e., what the program wants to achieve) and goals (i.e., the action steps to achieve the program's objectives) that center financial stability. Doing this ensures that any plans for or services within the program are built for longevity. As best practice, program goals should follow the SMART model (i.e., be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound).¹ For example, one program goal might be to secure \$100,000 by the end of the year to fund 2 peer specialist positions that will support participant linkages to community services.

Building and leveraging relationships

Having clear objectives and goals also helps to build partnerships with groups who have similar initiatives and objectives, as well as a vested interest in the population. Developing relationships with organizations, stakeholders, community leaders, elected officials, and advocates can help mobilize and influence others, particularly funders. Depending on your jurisdiction, these relationships may look different, but many successful programs have developed formalized partnerships such as sustainability task forces, advisory boards, or committees whose primary purpose is to advance the long-term financial stability of the program. Examples of how these relationships can help support financial sustainability include:

- ▶ Identifying opportunities for shared costs, such as staffing, rent, space, and other operational costs
- ▶ Combining initiatives to create a more robust program, which can attract more funders or those with larger funding options
- ▶ Developing materials to increase visibility of the program and lobby potential funders
- ▶ Working together to promote the program's successes through person-to-person engagements, such as town halls, media engagement, and policymaker outreach, which can lead to more funding opportunities

¹ See Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), *Setting Goals and Developing Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound Objectives* (Rockville, MS: SAMHSA, 2017), [C](#)

Anticipating funding gaps and identifying opportunities

You should have an understanding of current and projected future expenses to determine the costs needed to sustain your program. The best way to do this is by creating a start-up and an annual budget that incorporate all the expenses needed to effectively implement the program. Expenses can include rent, salaries, office supplies, utilities, technology, equipment, travel, and service overhead. Once those expenses are identified, the budget should detail how each item is covered through current funding sources. This will allow for quickly identifying any funding gaps, determining where additional resources might be needed, and spotting opportunities to redirect funding.

Programs should also use this information to help assess future financial needs and set specific, short- and long-term goals for achieving financial sustainability. When doing so, it is important to anticipate growth, decline, or shifts in funding needs (e.g., changes in salaries, funding sources) and the potential impact of these changes.

This type of analysis can also help your program and partners explore other funding opportunities and identify cost-savings through efforts, such as:

- ▶ Maximizing existing resources by expending the most restrictive or time-limited sources first and reserving more flexible options for expenses as needed (such as overhead, etc.)
- ▶ Reallocating funding from services that are duplicative or not producing effective results (see demonstrating impact section)
- ▶ Leveraging current resources to garner additional funding, including third-party payers, insurance reimbursement, and fee-for-services, which are helpful in closing and funding gaps not covered by grant sources
- ▶ Pursuing funding opportunities that are aligned with your program's mission beyond government funding, such as fundraising, foundation support, charitable donations, or membership support. Note that these funding options are also often less restrictive than government funding.
- ▶ Identifying opportunities for in-kind contributions, such as volunteer time, equipment, and supplies, etc.

Demonstrating impact to maintain and secure additional funding

Funders will want to see that the program is successful. Collecting data on program measures, such as number of participants, retention and attrition rates, and connections to supportive services can help demonstrate its impact. Lifting up personal examples can also showcase how the program is impacting participants. Information-sharing protocols among stakeholders will be needed to share data across the criminal justice and behavioral health systems. You should consult counsel when developing protocols to ensure adherence to all legal requirements. Once collected, these data can be used in a number of ways to promote the program's financial sustainability, such as aligning funding with program services that are making the greatest impact and reallocating funding from services that are not producing effective results.

Dig Deeper

The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center offers in-depth subject matter expertise and can connect you to communities that are currently implementing some of these approaches. Visit the **Center for Justice and Mental Health Partnerships** to learn more. For additional tips and tools that promote the sustainability of criminal justice-behavioral health efforts, visit the CSG Justice Center's web-based resource, **Financing the Future of Local Initiatives**.

Additional Resources

Read how the **Sarpy County Mental Health Program**, a Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program grantee in Sarpy County, Nebraska, leveraged state funding to sustain its program.

Integrated Funding to Reduce the Number of People with Mental Illnesses in Jails is a brief that outlines ways to leverage funding opportunities to maximize local mental health and public safety efforts.