

thinking  
outside

the  
box:  
montana's  
sustainability  
guide  
for  
afterschool  
programs





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# prologue

**W**hen trying to compile this guide, my colleagues and I met multiple times to discuss what kind of publication would best fit Montana. Growing up in Montana, I understand the prodigious resources, history, activities and culture Montana has to offer. I also understand that Montana is primarily a rural state, and, after working at the Montana Afterschool Network, I have found that the majority of sustainability resources for afterschool are for urban states and cities. We, at the Montana Afterschool Network, want to provide Montana afterschool program directors their own sustainability guide that pertains more to Montana's demographics.

This guide is presented to you as a quick reference and networking tool. After researching sustainability for afterschool programs, we consolidated the most relevant tips for Montana afterschool programs into this guide. We are aware that many afterschool program directors know what it takes to sustain a program, and this guide should be used to help pinpoint the key concepts, and to validate and assess efforts already in place.

In order to further apply the components of sustainability to Montana, afterschool program directors throughout the state were interviewed to identify their sustainability work, struggles and advice. Montana is a unique state which provides a strong network of support and assistance for organizations that work with youth. Although sustainability can be difficult in such a rural state, many directors agree that thinking outside the box can help achieve afterschool program success.

Sienna Clayborn  
Montana Afterschool Network, VISTA



# mission & vision

**H**aving vision, mission and goals is an important factor to sustaining afterschool programs, and is an important first step when starting a program.

A vision is:

- The overarching idea.
- An idealistic statement without limitations or obstacles.
- Without restrictions, and answers the question: What would you hope afterschool programs could accomplish?
- The drive for what you do; it *is* why you do what you do.

A mission is:

- Narrower than a vision.
- What you do to reach your vision.
- Limited by your capacity and community. It is guided by your community values and cultural values.
- Broad enough to provide broad accomplishments, yet narrow enough to make sure you accomplish what you set out to do.

Goals are:

- Very focused and specific.
- The specific tasks that need to happen to accomplish your mission.

Think of a vision as the “why” you are working in afterschool; the mission as the “what” you are doing in your program; and the goals as the “how” you are achieving your mission. They all work together as a step ladder toward accomplishment and success.

Resources

[http://www.allianceonline.org/FAQ/strategic\\_planning/what\\_s\\_in\\_vision\\_statement.faq](http://www.allianceonline.org/FAQ/strategic_planning/what_s_in_vision_statement.faq)  
[http://www.managementhelp.org/plan\\_dec/str\\_plan/stmnts.htm](http://www.managementhelp.org/plan_dec/str_plan/stmnts.htm)



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**The Whitefish Community Center**  
**Whitefish, Montana**  
**Program Type: tuition-free**  
**Jordan Tesar, Volunteer Coordinator, VISTA**  
**j\_tesar@hotmail.com**

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**A**fterschool programs help ensure safety and learning opportunities for all children in Whitefish, Montana. VISTA, Jordan Tesar has realized, after working at the Whitefish Community Center, that one of the most important components to an afterschool program’s sustainability is the ability to deal with change and alter the program if needed. Whether it is from the input given from youth or recognizing the need for organization improvement, Tesar understands that program revisions are required in order to prosper. When asked about change, Tesar replied, “We are very open to the possibility of change. I think to have success you have to be open to change, especially when resources are limited.” Tesar then added, “In fact, we are in the process of renovating our board and hopefully this will result in fresh faces and ideas.”

Tesar continued to stress the importance of a supportive, active board and community. Recently, Tesar and Program Director, Laura Blankenship, met up with a neighboring afterschool program to discuss the Whitefish Community Center’s board structure and gather ideas and suggestions on how to build a more active board. Tesar believed talking to another program gave insight on what board formation works. She hopes having a more active business board will give new ideas and help with marketing, advertising and campaigning for the program.

Tesar also stressed the importance of having a supportive community. “It’s important to have people interested in the

cause and who like working with youth,” Tesar said. Being the Volunteer Coordinator for the program, Tesar has experienced difficulty finding volunteers, but she is persistent in her attempts and accepts that collaboration takes time.

Although there are challenges in building community action, Tesar did applaud the Whitefish community for their strong support for youth and their concern to help the children who are in need. The Whitefish Community Center finds support from downtown businesses by offering space for displaying youth art pieces. A local church has provided their basement, which offers a safe, friendly hangout for 5<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> graders. Tesar anticipates a bright future for the Whitefish Community Center, and suspects the fresh new ideas of the board and community members will contribute to the program’s overall sustainability.



# evaluation

**E**valuating your program is an important step to sustainability. Evaluation allows you to:

- Know what you are doing and where you are in program effectiveness.
- Identify your program's impact and accomplishments.
- Align your program with your vision, mission and goals.
- Ensure your program is working in your community and addressing a community need.
- Better your program after identifying outcomes that need improvement.
- Provide funders with results, and offer them concrete evidence of the positive differences you are making in your community.

In order to benefit the most from an evaluation, you should use a variety of ways to evaluate, and include a variety of perspectives, including the youth you serve, staff, community members, parents, teachers, etc. Ideally, the feedback will be a constructive tool to improve and grow your program.

## Resources

[http://cyfernet.ces.ncsu.edu/cyfres/browse\\_2.php?search=Evaluation](http://cyfernet.ces.ncsu.edu/cyfres/browse_2.php?search=Evaluation)  
<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/snapshot6/index.html>  
[http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/ost\\_terms.html](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/ost_terms.html)

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**The Flagship Program**  
**Missoula, Montana**  
**Program Type: tuition-free**  
**Rosie Buzzas, Program Director**  
**[rbuzzas@wmmhc.org](mailto:rbuzzas@wmmhc.org)**

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**S**ustainability is dynamic by nature and always changing,” affirmed Rosie Buzzas, Director of The Flagship Program in Missoula, Montana. If anyone knows about sustaining afterschool programs, it is Buzzas. The Flagship Program, a tuition-free program, has been sustained for 11 years and serves 4,000 children a year in 10 Missoula schools.

When asked for sustainability guidance, Buzzas encouraged programs to create a solid, annually updated financial plan, while keeping an eye out for diverse funding sources. Buzzas suggested programs create a sustainability plan from day one, rather than scrambling for funds at the end of a grant cycle. Although the Flagship Program currently receives funds from twelve different sources, funding was not the first thing Buzzas brought up when asked about the Flagship Programs’ sustainability plan. Buzzas emphasized the need for programs to develop strategies that increase their visibility and marketing in the community. “People need to know what we’re doing,” she said. Buzzas attributed much of her marketing success to her business advisory board. Due to the board’s community connections, the program has been successful at getting production and airtimes donated, which help anchor the Flagship Program’s large public awareness campaign. To Buzzas it is about getting the name out there, finding community partners and volunteers, and building the reputation that Flagship provides diverse learning opportunities to young people.

Buzzas also acknowledged that evaluation plays a role in sustaining The Flagship Program. For her, evaluation helps her know what the program is doing, and how her program impacts the community. Buzzas found that measurable outcomes, via an evaluation process, help her improve her program. If she is not meeting the goals and mission of her program, she uses the evaluation results to locate areas in need of improvement. Buzzas knows that funders want results. When she can say that school attendance and school participation grew by three percent in a school she was serving, along with other supporting scientific data, funders are more likely to donate. Buzzas also informally evaluates her program by collecting successful youth and volunteer stories. Both data and personal stories help her gain support from the community, funders and legislators.

Buzzas explained she finds support from organizations in Missoula that share similar missions. She has found that by collaborating with these organizations, she is given the opportunity to share resources and knowledge. Buzzas confessed that afterschool programming faces constant obstacles. Her greatest struggle is juggling the various cycles of funding, but Buzzas has learned that building relationships with funders is the greatest way to overcome this obstacle. The relationships she has built with her funders help keep her posted on upcoming grant deadlines and the application process. Together this partnership and the partnerships with community members, businesses and organizations help better the community and the lives of Montana youth.



# quality

**Q**uality is an essential component to sustainability. Without quality, sustainability is not possible. The two are intertwined and work hand-in-hand to offer the best afterschool programs. Many of the quality tips listed below overlap with the sustainability concepts suggested in this guide, which demonstrates their close correlation. Typically, quality afterschool programs will have:

- Goal setting and strong management, including community coordination and collaboration.
- Qualified and committed staff that continue professional development training and are recognized for their hard work.
- Safe and healthy environments.
- Collaborative, diverse partners.
- Family involvement.
- Engaging and enriching activities for the children.
- Partnership with the schools and school personnel.
- Evaluation of progress and effectiveness.

Think of what your program offers in regards to quality. What components could you better establish for your afterschool program? Like sustainability, quality is ongoing and a crucial part to afterschool.

## Resources

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdecomp/21stCentury.htm>

<http://www.naaweb.org/>

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**HANDS**  
**Great Falls, Montana**  
**Program Type: tuition-based, licensed**  
**Kim Yarlott**  
**kim\_yarlott@gfps.k12.mt.us**

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**H**eroes And Neighbors Down at the School (HANDS) Program Director, Kim Yarlott, believes that quality in afterschool programs is much more important than quantity. When asked for advice for afterschool program directors, Yarlott responded, “Don’t get too far ahead of yourself. Make sure what you’ve got is quality and then go from there.” Yarlott reflected on the program’s past and explained that HANDS began in 1993 with only three programs and gradually grew to 15 programs located around Great Falls elementary schools. Yarlott attributed some of her quality success to the strong support from the schools. Great Falls elementary schools offer a safe place for the children, and promote the program by allowing Yarlott to distribute flyers about HANDS to Kindergarteners’ parents. Licensing also provides an image of quality that Yarlott proceeds to live up to each year. Requirements of licensed programs include eight hours of staff professional development training, which is typically exceeded by Yarlott’s staff.

Yarlott has also attained success by connecting HANDS with other community organizations. Collaboration with other organizations provides Yarlott community support, involvement and partnerships to offer children the greatest opportunities. Yarlott has formed mutual partnerships with the YMCA, Community Homes, Paris Gibson Square, and the food bank. Yarlott explained that the food bank helps supply snacks for the program by offering food at a low cost. In return, HANDS has offered plenty of opportunities

for the children to give back to the Great Falls community. In the summer of 2007, HANDS children formed a campaign to support the local food bank. The program has also participated in other various community service projects, including Kids Interested in Spreading Smiles, in which HANDS children collected needed items for the local children’s shelter, and Pennies for Pets, which gave money to the Humane Society. Not only does HANDS provide opportunities for the children to become involved in their community, HANDS is also showing the community that youth are important assets and members of society.

HANDS, like all other afterschool programs, has encountered obstacles. Yarlott constantly struggles to find stability in staff. She ascribed this barrier to the inconvenient hours of before and after school. She often employs college and high school students because of their flexible schedules. Yarlott also concerns herself with funding, but has had much success with her tuition-based program. Tuition has helped her sustain her program because she does not have to constantly wonder where funding will be coming from. Although children do have to pay, Yarlott offers scholarships for those families who cannot afford fees. Along with the Community Block Grant, twenty percent of the tuition paid each month gets put back into the scholarship fund to provide everyone the opportunity to participate in HANDS.

# funding

**F**inding funding for afterschool programs can be difficult, especially in Montana, and especially in rural communities. Finding funding for your program requires creative thinking, both in finding new resources, and effectively using current funding. In order to best take advantage of funding resources, remember to:

- Diversify your funding. Look at a variety of funding opportunities, including public/private, short-term/long-term, flexible/dedicated, in-kind/financial, and federal, state and local.
- Envision your community as a resource. Identify all supports and assets in your community.
- Make use of unique skills offered by community members and incorporate them into your curriculum.
- Find other youth programs or community centers in your area. Coordinate activities or funding opportunities with programs that share similar interests and goals.
- Make sure your funding resources match your vision and mission. When applying for grants, ask yourself, does my program have the capacity to manage the grant? Does it match our mission?
- Think creatively. Find grants or funding sources that compliment your program, such as substance abuse prevention, obesity prevention or sources that address at-risk youth.
- Leverage. Make use of other programs' staff, resources and funding through a partnership. Many organizations are looking for opportunities to work with youth and children from low-income backgrounds for funding purposes, which can be beneficial for both your program and theirs.
- Develop relationships with funders so they are encouraged and enjoy working with you.

Finding and maintaining funding takes a lot of work, but consistent work from day one will be beneficial in the long run and will ultimately keep your program running.

Resources

[http://www.financeproject.org/publications/Thinkingbroadly\\_PM.pdf](http://www.financeproject.org/publications/Thinkingbroadly_PM.pdf)

<http://www.financeproject.org/irc/ost/funding.asp>

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**Alberton Afterschool Program**  
**Alberton, Montana**  
**Program Type: tuition-free**  
**Kathy Woodford, Board President**  
**albertonafterschool@hotmail.com**

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**K**athy Woodford, Alberton Afterschool Program Board President, has overcome many rural challenges. Woodford described the challenges her rural program faced over the phone. Staffing, Woodford noted, was hard to find and maintain, especially the first year. Staff must be willing to work awkward hours and be qualified to work with children. Woodford initially looked to community volunteers, and substitute and full time teachers; she ultimately found that nearby University of Montana and the Indian Bible School, home to qualified students with flexible schedules, were the best resources.

Woodford struggled to find local financial support. Due to her rural location, she soon realized many local businesses had already been “hit by everyone,” and getting funding from them was tough competition. So when the Alberton Afterschool Program needed \$6000 to finish out the 2006-2007 school year, she created a sponsor program, in which the program asked for sponsorship from local and surrounding area business and community members. Donators were thanked in the local newspaper and awarded a certificate of appreciation. Woodford has also found financial support from grants offered by various foundations, including: MOST grants, Title V, School Food Program, Town Pump, NorthWest Energy, and others. After talking with funders, Woodford was informed that some prefer small afterschool programs to collaborate together in a large request as it makes distribution easier on the funders. She is currently researching this option and reaches out to any small afterschool programs that may be

interested in combining efforts to apply for grants.

Woodford also says that community involvement and support are critical for sustainability. Woodford makes use of community members’ unique talents. “A lot of people don’t realize they have a talent,” Woodford commented. “Pretty much everyone does. You just have to approach them.” Woodford offers activities to Alberton youth that use parents’ talents, the Post Office, Volunteer Fire Department, Alberton Community Garden and other organizations. Woodford suggested she views all community organizations and businesses as assets when she explained that they all have a field of interest that is beneficial to youth.

Woodford has also found positive benefits from being located in the school. The program is run as a line item in the school budget. Although the program must raise its own funds, the school assumes liability, provides insurance, and the afterschool program “piggy backs” on the school’s supplies and website. Along with assistance from the school, Woodford accounted much of her success to the Alberton community. “People are willing to step up and help out,” Woodford said. She stated that Alberton has a community spirit that can be described as togetherness, closeness and willingness to help.

Over time, Woodford has found solutions to typical rural struggles, and believes that the greatest advice she can give is to gain community support. Woodford commented, “You have to prove to them that the program will work out and it’s something to support.”



# partner<sup>engaging</sup>s

**W**hen talking to afterschool program directors throughout Montana, the importance of community support was emphasized as a crucial part of sustaining programs. Many even expressed community support and involvement as the most important asset an afterschool program could have. When engaging community partners, remember to:

- Map community assets. Youth should be included as important assets and resources.
- Identify who would make good advocates and spokespeople. There are different types of leaders with different strengths. Remember those both in and out of the community spotlight. Often, youth are strongly passionate people and are an afterschool program's best advocates.
- Think broadly. Who does the youth in your community affect?
- Participate in already existing community coalitions, youth organizations or town meetings.
- Advocate for your program. Show the value of why members of the community would want to become invested in your program.
- Establish mutually beneficial relationships. Find out what your program has to offer others and what others can offer you.

People in your community can be your best resource. Everyone has something to offer, whether it is a talent to teach the children, an advocate voice, volunteer hours or funds. Remember to view all community members as potential supporters and advocates of your program.

## Resources

<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/families/index.html>  
<http://www.financeproject.org/irc/ost/partnerships.asp>  
[http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/funding\\_sustain\\_worksheet.doc](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/funding_sustain_worksheet.doc)

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**LINKS for Learning**  
**Livingston, Montana**  
**Program Type: tuition-free, 21st CCLC**  
**Julie Hancock, Program Director**  
**[jhancock@livingston.k12.mt.us](mailto:jhancock@livingston.k12.mt.us)**

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**2**<sup>1st</sup> Century Learning Community Center, LINKS for Learning, in Livingston, Montana, has served 75 children a day since 1999. Julie Hancock, Program Director of LINKS, said community collaboration has always been her greatest asset to sustaining her afterschool program. “Collaborating with other organizations is a way to ‘share the pie,’” Hancock said, “and is a way to provide broader opportunities for youth.” Hancock described Livingston as a community that works well together and has found much support. LINKS has received much encouragement from other youth organizations. “We don’t want to see any organization working with youth fail,” Hancock said of the organizations in Livingston.

During the 2007 summer program, LINKS partnered with Gallatin County YMCA to provide their children with a full-day program. LINKS offered academia in the morning, and the YMCA provided services in the afternoon. Hancock also involves parents by offering eight family nights per year as a chance for families to meet, have dinner, and receive information regarding the program and other community services. In addition, LINKS partners with programs such as the YMCA, Big Brother Big Sister, Hopa Mountain, Juvenile Justice, Even Start Program, the library, Montana Outdoor Science, Manaia Youth Empowerment Program, Montana State University and Montana Campus Compact.

Hancock also expressed the importance of evaluation. By talking to parents, children, and staff, Hancock is able to

adjust the program to meet their needs. Hancock said that by keeping up with what constitutes a quality assessment of her community, she can adjust staff, curriculum and schedule to align with community needs.

Local collaboration gives organizations in Livingston the chance to share activities and resources. Hancock suggested that afterschool programs should identify how community needs are addressed. Evaluation, ongoing communication, and informal, regular feedback are important in order to adjust your program to the community’s changing needs. Ultimately, the more feedback received, the more an afterschool program can positively impact Montana youth.

# marketing

**W**hat is happening in your community? Where do you turn for news? Even if your program is located in a very rural setting, *every* community has methods to get the word out. Brainstorm with your staff on where to look for media sponsorship. Start a dialogue with your local media. Although a relationship between a media source and your program may take time to develop, it is well worth the effort. The following ideas may help you connect with your local media:

- Meet with the editorial board of your local newspaper, and TV station to find out who might promote your program. Who covers education and youth events?
- Locate inexpensive resources, such as local printing companies that would provide a discount or highlight your program in a community newsletter.
- Utilize ready-made national resources, such as the Lights On Afterschool! promotion kit available at the Afterschool Alliance website.
- Internet access can greatly increase your promotion opportunities. Can you get a local discount on your service?
- Have you developed your “elevator speech?” How would you describe your program in thirty seconds? How often do you share this message with community members?
- Keep in mind that voters respond to the following three messages: Afterschool opportunities keep kids safe, help working families, and inspire learning.

A successful marketing plan involves developing your message points, and educating your community on the benefits of your program. This requires an ongoing relationship with your local media. A relationship will not grow overnight, nonetheless having the support of your local media ensures that a variety of community stakeholders will hear your message and hopefully take action.

## Resources

<http://www.npaction.org/article/archive/236>  
[http://www.mtnonprofit.org/pdf/AdvocacyToolkit6\\_8.pdf](http://www.mtnonprofit.org/pdf/AdvocacyToolkit6_8.pdf)  
<http://www.mtnewspapers.com/links/>

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**ROCKS Program**  
**Miles City, Montana**  
**Program Type: tuition-based, licensed**  
**Joyce Vera, Program Director**  
**veraj@milescc.edu**

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**J**oyce Vera, Program Director of the Raising Our Community Kids Safely (ROCKS) Program in Miles City, Montana, has learned that her sustainability derives primarily from marketing her program. Vera has expanded program involvement by going out into her community, making connections and advocating for her program. She described herself as a hand shaker and attributed much of ROCKS success by the relationships she has built with various community members, including local businesses, parents and the media. Vera understands the importance of having an established rapport with public relations and the media to ensure press coverage of ROCKS activities. Vera stated, “The more advertising you can do for your program, the more popular your program will be.”

Vera views her community as an asset and looks to the community and state for resources and tools. Vera has gone to various organizations and businesses in Miles City for help with the curriculum, including providing field trips, tours and presentations. Vera has found that Miles City is incredibly supportive and she cannot remember a time she has been turned down. In July 2007, Vera utilized the police station, Montana Highway Patrol and the Miles City Police K-9 Unit for a lesson on the U.S.A. She has partnered with Fish Wildlife and Parks, the fish hatchery, Pizza Hut, Tire Rama, the local bank and others to provide various activities for the children. Vera has also made use of the AmeriCorps VISTA program and currently has a VISTA employed to apply for grants. With her extremely busy schedule, Vera has benefited from having someone

work on grant applications so she can stay focused on running the program.

Vera has also turned to the community for financial support. Although ROCKS is a tuition based program, approximately twenty-five percent of her funding comes from grants, donations from local businesses, St. Vincent DePaul Bank Foundation and fundraisers. Vera organizes a haunted house each year, in which business people and parents volunteer their time to help make the fundraiser a success.

When asked if she had any advice for afterschool program directors, Vera responded, “If you’re just getting started, visit afterschool programs. Find out what works and what doesn’t, because you can’t do it on your own. I wish I would have traveled and talked to some people.”

After a pause, I asked if there was anything else. Vera thought a moment and added, “You have to be willing to learn and be a hand shaker. And you have to be proud of the things you do and the things you want to accomplish.”



# additional references

- <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/sustain.pdf>
- <http://www.financeproject.org/Publications/Brief3.pdf>
- <http://www.financeproject.org/publications/FN-DOJ.pdf>
- <http://www.financeproject.org/Publications/ostpartnershipguide.pdf>
- <http://www.financeproject.org/publications/FN-mental-health.pdf>
- <http://www.financeproject.org/publications/FN-DOJ.pdf>
- <http://prevention.mt.gov/>
- [http://www.nationalservice.org/for\\_organizations/how/index.asp](http://www.nationalservice.org/for_organizations/how/index.asp)
- [http://www.mtafterschool.com/afterschool\\_resources.cfm](http://www.mtafterschool.com/afterschool_resources.cfm)
- <http://www.hhs.gov/grants/index.html>
- <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/>
- <http://www.financeproject.org/irc/yp.asp>
- <http://www.ppv.org>
- <http://www.ysdi.org>
- <http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/childcareregs.pdf>
- <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org>
- <http://www.forumfyi.org>
- <http://www.aypf.org>
- <http://www.mott.org>
- [http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/lights\\_on/index.cfm](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/lights_on/index.cfm)
- <http://www.financeproject.org/Publications/ruralost.pdf>
- <http://www.financeproject.org/Publications/costworksheet.pdf>
- <http://www.nsba.org/site/docs/34300/34244.pdf>
- [http://www.financeproject.org/publications/findingfunding\\_PM.pdf](http://www.financeproject.org/publications/findingfunding_PM.pdf)
- <http://www.learningpt.org/page.php?pageID=4>
- <http://www.aidainc.net/Publications/Sustainability%20Toolkit.pdf>
- <http://www.financeproject.org/irc/sustainability.asp>



