

CHAPTER THREE

From a Manager's Point of View: Risk Management and Program Sustainability

1. Introduction

"Take calculated risks. That is quite different from being rash."

-George S. Patton

"Inside my empty bottle I was constructing a lighthouse while all the others were making ships."

-Charles Simic

Risk management and program sustainability are critical issues which must be addressed in the earliest stages of any new project. Too often, program and service design and implementation activities within an organization are handled by individuals other than those bearing the responsibility for evaluating risk, calculating cash flow, and forecasting revenue and expenses. Developing a detailed and comprehensive communication plan, which is shared liberally throughout the agency, will reduce the potential for misunderstandings and unpleasant surprises during and after implementation of a program or service.

- a. The definition of risk management related to Recovery Support Services programs for the purposes of this chapter was adopted from the Irish Health Service System ("Risk Management in Mental Health Services," Health Service Executive Guidance Document, 2009): "The culture, processes and structures that are directed towards realizing potential opportunities whilst managing [potential] adverse effects." In other words, "The environment and procedures that aid personal growth in those recovering from mental health or substance abuse disorders, while minimizing hindrances to growth." While risk can never be eliminated completely, it can be minimized by ensuring that there is:
 - i. adequate preparation of all staff for the innovations and changes,
 - ii. formulation of sound hiring and human resource policies (including well-thought-out job descriptions),
 - iii. evaluation of potential liability exposures and insurance coverage gaps,
 - iv. verification of required staffing ratios and shifts required,
 - v. appropriate selection and training of supervisory staff,
 - vi. good communication among all staff,
 - vii. continuous service user feedback and input,
 - viii. sufficient attention to the safety of staff and persons served, and
 - ix. appropriate ongoing training and support for both staff and individuals receiving services.

There is widespread agreement that employing RSSs can actually reduce risk and increase levels of safety within the community behavioral health environment. Recovery Support Services have proven to significantly benefit persons in the criminal justice system -

particularly those in recovery from substance use or requiring personalized and individualized supports.

- b. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) “research has shown that peer support facilitates recovery and reduces health care costs,”³ and the Consumer Operated Service Programs (COSP) Multisite Research Initiative revealed that “consumer/survivors experienced significant improvements in wellbeing” as a result of their participation in peer run recovery support services.”⁴

This chapter summarizes the best practices for evaluating and addressing key risk management and program sustainability issues through a series of recommended questions, processes, and checklists.

2. Best Practices - Sustainability of Recovery Support Services Programs with RSSs

Sustainability requires thinking ahead and acting in ways that ensure the program will be viable on a long-term basis. The agency must carefully consider the fiscal, clinical and administrative impact of the Recovery Support Services program.

- a. Is the culture of the agency ready for the addition of RSSs working in recovery support roles?
- b. If your agency launches a program using a time-limited grant or grants for seed money, what is the plan for sustainability once this form of funding runs out?
- c. How will your agency consistently ensure quality services on an ongoing basis?
- d. Has adequate staff training and supervision been arranged?
- e. Is there appropriate administrative and agency support?
- f. Does that agency support include a willingness to hire more than one RSS?
- g. How will referrals be made?
- h. How will RSSs and other staff work together?
- i. How will the RSS role benefit individuals receiving services?
- j. What statewide and regional supports exist?

These are just examples of some of the questions that should be answered in planning and developing a successful Recovery Support Services program. What other questions do you believe should be addressed?

³ Excerpt from “Peer Support and Social Seclusion,” SAMSHA website topic

⁴ Campbell, J., Lichtenstein, C., Teague, G. Johnson, M., Yates, B., Sonnefeld, et al (2006) *The Consumer Operated Service Programs (COSP) Multisite Research Initiative: Final Report*. Saint Louis, MO: Coordinating Center at the Missouri Institute of Mental Health.

3. Phase I, Processes for the Manager and Administrative Team to Consider

- a. The process often begins with an individual in the agency sharing what he or she has learned about recovery support services and the potential value to the agency and individuals receiving services.
- b. Upon recognizing the benefits, the agency head consults with the governing body and assembles a team to evaluate and decide on a course of action. Ideally, the team:
 - i. Involves key leadership.
 - ii. Obtains input from individuals receiving services (through advisory councils, surveys, and focus groups).
 - iii. Gives all team members adequate opportunities to share ideas and concerns.
 - iv. Educates and orients agency staff about involving individuals receiving services as RSSs.
 - v. Evaluates the agency buy-in and readiness among the various work groups.
 - vi. Determines if buy-in and general agency readiness are sufficient to proceed.
- c. If buy-in and conditions appear favorable, a strategic planning process begins:
 - i. Consider a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) Analysis or similar tool – focusing on agency culture and readiness.
 - ii. Develop or review the agency’s Vision and Mission Statements.
 - iii. Determine if Vision and Mission Statements adequately support the Recovery Support Services program you are planning to create.
 - iv. If necessary, work with your administrative team and governing body to revise your agency’s vision and mission statements.
- d. Before moving forward with your plan to implement a Recovery Support Services Program, other important questions to ask include:
 - i. What are some of the potential negative outcomes you wish to avoid?
 - ii. What type of process do you not want to see at your agency?
 - iii. What will success look like?
 - iv. What are some real or imagined risks associated with developing a Recovery Support Services Program?
 - v. What have other agencies learned through experience?
 - vi. How do you plan to educate other community service providers and stakeholders about your Recovery Support Services and the unique role of the RSS?
- e. The issue of sustainability should be readdressed during each stage of the planning process and each time there is a major change in the project scope or timetable:
 - i. Financial viability – how will you fund the startup of this program?
 - Grants
 - Fee for Service
 - Other community support (such as “708” Community Mental Health Board)
 - ii. What are your preliminary thoughts about long term clinical and financial viability?
 - Staff Productivity

- Staff Competence
- Staff Certification
- iii. What kind of supports and resources will you try to access from the state?
 - Regional Recovery Specialist Support
 - Federal Grants

4. Phase II, General Preparation Checklist

- a. Training and Education of Staff – Essential to Program Development:
 - i. Review CRSS credential – domains, competencies and certification
 - ii. Select training topics
 - iii. Pursue agency to agency mentorship – program sharing
 - iv. Establish planning for supervisory competency
 - v. Identify what you want your RSS staff to do
- b. Risk Management Questions to Consider:
 - i. What does proper planning look like and how will you accomplish it?
 - ii. What are the implications of not getting input from individuals receiving services?
 - iii. What approach will you use to obtain input from individuals receiving services?
 - iv. Who is the right kind of supervisor for this program? Background? Training?
 - v. Does the agency have the support of its board for this program?
- c. Sustainability Issues:
 - i. Are there realistic timelines for program start up and long term sustainability?
 - ii. Has the agency thoroughly looked at its cultural change needs to support this program?
 - iii. What are the desired outcomes for this program? What are the quality indicators?
 - iv. Is this programming a part of new employee orientation? Who will do it?
 - v. Is there an ongoing training and education plan for agency staff?

5. Phase III, Program and Service Specifics

- a. Program Planning
 - i. Determining what the program will be. Examples include:
 - Community Support
 - IPS
 - ACT
 - Individual Mentoring
 - Crisis Support– Hospital/ER - respite, diversion programming
 - Non-Funded Services (NMR)
 - WRAP/Groups
 - Waiting List
 - Housing

- Drop-in Center
- ii. Write Initial Program Plan – Address Cost and Staffing:
 - Program narrative
 - Timeline
 - Program budget
 - iii. Develop Job Descriptions
 - iv. Human Resource Education and Considerations:
 - Full/Part Time
 - Benefits
 - Reasonable Accommodations
 - Background Checks
- b. Risk Management Questions to Consider:
 - i. Do the job descriptions contain the appropriate components for the RSSs as well as the other personnel who supervise or interface with the RSSs?
 - ii. Are the role expectations clear? (e.g. will the RSSs facilitate groups? If so, what type? What are the expectations for sharing their experiences and engaging in advocacy efforts? In what ways will they share lived experience?)
 - iii. Do the job descriptions appropriately describe tasks and responsibilities using the domain section from the CRSS manual?
 - iv. Have you consulted providers who are operating successful RSS programs?
 - v. What do you think will happen if your agency does not have a clear, written plan?
 - vi. What is the best way to educate your HR personnel about recruiting for the new position(s)?
 - vii. What plans are in place to educate individuals receiving services as to the benefits of Recovery Support Services?
 - c. Sustainability Issues:
 - i. What are your program quality indicators?
 - ii. How will you collect your data sets?
 - iii. Have you created a plan for systematic program review and revision?
 - iv. Have you devised a plan for employee feedback on program improvements/successes?
6. Phase IV, Program Implementation—Preparing to Hire and Interviewing Candidates
 - a. Preparing to Hire and Interviewing the Candidate:
 - i. Is the interviewer well-versed about the role of the RSS and Recovery Support Services?
 - ii. Is the interviewer informed about the parameters of asking about lived experience in an interview setting?
 - iii. Does the candidate possess competent public speaking skills?
 - iv. Is the candidate sufficient in mentoring skills?
 - v. Does the candidate possess adequate group facilitation skills?

- vi. Is the candidate proficient in content knowledge?
- vii. Do you perceive potential in the candidate to be trained and learn about recovery principles and helping relationships?
- viii. Is the candidate capable of becoming certified (CRSS)?
- b. Risk Management Questions to Consider:
 - i. Has your agency addressed liability concerns to avoid discriminatory or insensitive hiring practices for this position? What questions should you avoid asking during the hiring process?
 - ii. Has your agency considered the input of regional recovery staff?
 - iii. Has your agency gathered input of other RSS staff inside and outside of the agency?
 - iv. Has your agency determined the level of your involvement in agency-to-agency mentorship?
 - v. Has your agency decided your level of involvement in the Recovery Support Services Learning Collaborative?
- c. Sustainability Issues:
 - i. Does the agency show indications of its commitment to the role of RSSs in community mental health?
 - ii. Has the agency decided to initially hire more than one RSS?
 - iii. Is there a training plan in place for the newly hired RSS staff (especially WRAP, CRSS)?
 - iv. Is the supervisor sufficiently involved to address early program development needs?
 - v. Based on what you have learned from other agencies that have developed recovery support programs, what ethics and values are important for your new employees to acquire?

7. Phase V, Program Implementation - Ensuring Proper Supervision and Support

- a. Supervision:
 - i. Supervisor has detailed knowledge of the CRSS domains
 - ii. Supervisor ensures adequate time for regular meetings
 - iii. Supervisor focuses on work and not personal therapy
 - iv. Supervisor is a champion of recovery services
 - v. Supervisor properly manages boundary issues, including:
 - Confidentiality
 - Disclosure of personal information
 - Dual relationships
- b. Risk Management Questions to Consider:
 - i. How are new staff members being trained to document the work they do?
 - ii. What does the coordination of RSS services with treatment team planning look like at your agency?
 - iii. What kind of assistance is planned for helping RSSs obtain their CRSS and WRAP training?

- iv. Are the tasks and roles of the RSS within the parameters of their training and competencies?
 - c. Sustainability Issues:
 - i. Are productivity expectations properly aligned with the RSS role and function?
 - ii. Is there a strong and positive supervisory relationship?
 - iii. Are there executive oversight, involvement, and commitment to the program?
 - iv. Is supervision planned to be regular, timely and consistent?
8. Phase VI, Continuous Quality Improvement
- a. Program Evaluation:
 - i. Have clear outcomes and indicators
 - ii. Use data to inform change
 - iii. Conduct a WRAP plan for the organization
 - iv. Carry out a systematic review
 - v. Implement ongoing training
 - b. Risk Management Questions to Consider:
 - i. How will you know what you are and are not accomplishing?
 - ii. How will you determine the staff training needs?
 - iii. How will you gather feedback from consumer surveys in order to acquire the outcome data you're looking for?
 - iv. How will the outcome data be shared?
 - v. Who will be responsible for making sure that adjustments are data driven?
 - c. Sustainability Issues:
 - i. What are the early indicators/warning signs of success or failure of your program?
 - ii. Have you evaluated team member roles and functions?
 - iii. How are the internal and external workgroup relationships working?
 - iv. How will you decide to expand or contract your program?
 - v. What other revenue/funding streams might you consider?