



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Community Services

**Training, Technical Assistance, and Capacity Building for the
Community Services Block Grant Program**

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Introduction

The Office of Community Services (OCS) works in partnership with States, communities, and other agencies to provide a range of human and economic development services and activities which ameliorate the causes and characteristics of poverty and otherwise assist persons in need. The aim of these services and activities is to increase the capacity of individuals and families to become self-sufficient, to revitalize communities, and to build the stability and capacity of children, youth, and families so that they become able to create their own opportunities.

OCS administers several human services programs, including the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) program. CSBG legislation authorizes the Secretary of Health and Human Services to utilize a percentage of appropriated funds for training, technical assistance, planning, evaluation, and performance measurement, to assist States and local entities that receive CSBG funds in carrying out corrective action activities and monitoring, and for reporting and data collection activities.

This report details CSBG training, technical assistance, and capacity building activities as well as the strategic plan to be supported by Fiscal Year 2007-2009 CSBG funds. The activities and strategic plan are presented in the context of an on-going multi-year initiative by OCS to stimulate and strengthen accountability within CSBG. This effort helps to ensure a results-oriented strategy for the management and delivery of services to low-income people.

The information contained in this report was compiled from a review of training, technical assistance, and capacity building activities of the CSBG program as determined by Federal staff of OCS within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Community Services Block Grant (CSBG)

History

The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) was created during President Reagan's consolidation of domestic social programs into block grants to the States. The program was originally authorized by the Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 1981, P.L. 97-35, the Community Services Block Grant Act, as a block grant. It was most recently authorized in 1998 by the Coats Human Services Reauthorization Act of 1998, P.L. 105-285 and provides for formula grants to States and Federal and State-recognized Indian Tribes and tribal organizations. CSBG is a Federal, anti-poverty block grant which funds the operations of a State-administered network of local agencies. This CSBG network consists of more than 1,100 agencies that create, coordinate and deliver programs and services to low-income Americans in 96 percent of the nation's counties.

Most agencies in the CSBG network are Community Action Agencies (CAAs), created through the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. This Act created a consortium of programs that preceded the CSBG in promoting the health, education, and welfare of low-income families. Community representation and accountability are hallmarks of the CSBG network, where each agency is governed by a tripartite board. This board structure consists of elected public officials, representatives of the low-income community, and appointed leaders from the private sector. For the purposes of this report, "CAA" will refer to all local agencies in the CSBG network.

Because the CSBG funds the central management and core activities of these agencies, the CSBG network is able to mobilize additional resources to combat the central causes of poverty.

Mission and Purpose

The CSBG mission is to provide States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, U.S. Territories, Federal and State-recognized Indian Tribes and tribal organizations, CAAs, migrant and seasonal farmworkers or other organizations designated by the States, funds to alleviate the causes and conditions of poverty in communities. Grant amounts are determined by a formula based on each State's and Indian Tribe's poverty population. Grantees receiving funds under the CSBG program are required to provide services and activities addressing the following:

- Employment;
- Education;
- Better use of available income;
- Housing;
- Nutrition;
- Emergency services; and
- Health.

Partners

State CSBG Agencies

Each State designates a State agency to act as the lead agency, or State CSBG agency, for purposes of administering CSBG. State CSBG agencies are responsible for developing the State plan, conducting reviews of CAAs, and ensuring CSBG funds are directed towards the statutory purposes of the CSBG program. The CSBG Act requires that 90 percent of the funds that States receive be allocated to service providers who administer the CSBG program at the community level. Accordingly, CSBG State agencies pass-through at least 90 percent of CSBG funds to CAAs referred to in the CSBG Act as eligible entities.

The remaining funds may be used at the State's discretion for programs that help to accomplish the CSBG program goals. Discretionary funds are primarily used for activities such as Statewide initiatives including research, information dissemination and coalition building, competitive or demonstration grant projects, training and technical assistance for CAAs including performance measurement training and new management information systems, services expansion to new geographic areas, and programs such as crime prevention, volunteer mobilization, disaster relief, health care for the working poor and other programs that address needs identified by the State agencies.

State Community Action Agency (CAA) Associations

As a result of an OCS initiative to build capacity within the CSBG network, OCS funds 49 State Community Action Agency (CAA) Associations. Each association is governed by a board of directors. The size, scope of activities, services provided, and budget of each association is unique.

As providers of training and technical assistance, State CAA associations increase the capacity of local CAAs to carry out the mandate of the CSBG Act and measure results. State CAA associations provide training focused on specific needs identified by CAAs in their States. While the types of training vary from State-to-State and year-to-year, the vast majority of State CAA associations have played pivotal roles in preparing and assisting local CAAs with implementing the Results-Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) system. State CAA associations provide training in fiscal accountability, improving local board governance, strengthening case management systems, modernizing information technology, and being effective anti-poverty advocates. The State CAA associations also help strengthen the accountability of CAAs and help them avoid financial problems and other organizational crises.

The funding OCS provides to State CAA associations serves as a cornerstone, enabling the associations to secure additional resources; provide targeted training and technical assistance; and build internal and external partnerships within the CSBG network.

Community Action Agencies (CAAs)

Community Action Agencies are local, private, non-profit and public agencies that were established under the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 to work to alleviate poverty. More than 1,100 CAAs deliver services and are a primary source of direct support for low-income communities. A key component of CAAs is the tripartite board. The tripartite board must consist of one-third democratically-selected representatives of low-income individuals and families in the neighborhood served, one-third elected public officials or their representatives, and one-third representing business, industry, labor, law enforcement, religious, educational groups or other major groups or interests in the service area. This unique composition ensures the interests and concerns of low-income communities are accurately represented by CAAs.

CAAs have the ability to mobilize community stakeholders and deploy diverse program activities and services that specifically address conditions of poverty. Nationwide, CAAs use their core CSBG funding to leverage almost \$10 billion in total funding, and provide a multitude of services on behalf of low-income individuals and families. CAAs provide services to more than 15 million low-income people annually in 96 percent of the nation's counties. Approximately 21 percent of all Americans living in poverty and several million more families with incomes only slightly above the poverty line were served by CAAs in 2005. Among them were more than 3.7 million children.

Community Action Partnership (CAP)

The Community Action Partnership was established in 1971 as the National Association of Community Action Agencies (NACAA). CAP is the national organization representing the interests of the more than 1,100 CAAs working to fight poverty at the local level. CAP's mission is to be a national forum for policy on poverty and to strengthen, promote, represent, and serve its network of member agencies to assure that the issues of the poor are effectively heard and addressed. To achieve its mission, CAP promotes policy and advocacy initiatives as well as facilitates educational opportunities that support and empower CAAs.

Community Action Program Legal Services, Inc. (CAPLAW)

The Community Action Program Legal Services is a nonprofit membership organization, established in 1989, dedicated to providing the legal resources necessary to sustain and strengthen the CAAs. Through its in-house legal staff and a network of private attorneys, CAPLAW provides legal consultation, training, and publications on a wide variety of legal and management topics. This assistance enables CAAs to operate legally sound organizations and to promote the effective participation of low-income people in the planning and delivery of CAA programs and services, thereby enhancing CAAs' ability to provide the nation's poor with opportunities to improve their quality of life and achieve their full potential.

National Association for State Community Services Programs (NASCSPP)

The National Association for State Community Services Programs (NASCSPP) was incorporated in the 1960's as the National Association of State Economic Opportunity Office Directors. In 1978, the name was changed to NASCSPP to reflect the consolidation of anti-poverty programs at the State level and the creation of block grants at the Federal level.

NASCSPP's vision encompasses the empowerment of low-income families to reach self-sufficiency through helping States attain full utilization of their resources and implement an extensive array of services to low-income families, including weatherization, energy assistance, child care, nutrition, employment, State energy programs, job training, and housing in urban, suburban and rural communities.

CSBG Program Performance

Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA)

The Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) addresses accountability and performance by applying a results-based approach to program planning and reporting. GPRA measures for the CSBG program reflect the broad purpose of CSBG – to reduce or eliminate conditions of poverty among low-income families and the communities in which they live. Most human service programs are single-purposed and focused on one aspect of family or community life. CSBG promotes coordinated anti-poverty initiatives among local CAAs. These CAAs marshal and combine various single-purpose resources into one overall strategy, which are designed to move families and communities from dependency to self-sufficiency. To accurately address GPRA requirements, OCS developed two GPRA measures for CSBG:

1. The number of conditions of poverty reduced or eliminated among low-income individuals, families, and communities as a result of community action interventions.

This GPRA measure captures both the individual conditions of family and community poverty that are addressed by CSBG and other resources mobilized by CAAs. This measure also examines the broader outcomes, such as economic self-sufficiency, that can only be achieved through coordinated action.

2. The number of volunteer hours donated to CAAs.

This GPRA measure emphasizes the program's ability to increase community resources and promote investment in low-income individuals and communities to actively fight poverty.

Results-Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA)

Results-Oriented Management and Accountability, or ROMA, is a performance-based initiative designed to promote greater effectiveness among State and local agencies receiving CSBG funds. ROMA was created in 1994 by an ongoing task force of Federal, State, and local community action officials – the Monitoring and Assessment Task Force (MATF). MATF also developed six national community action goals that guide ROMA implementation:

- Goal 1: Low-income people become more self-sufficient.
- Goal 2: The conditions in which low-income people live are improved.
- Goal 3: Low-income people own a stake in their community.
- Goal 4: Partnerships among supporters and providers of service to low-income people are achieved.
- Goal 5: Agencies increase their capacity to achieve results.
- Goal 6: Low-income people, especially vulnerable populations, achieve their potential by strengthening family and other supportive systems.

Based upon principles contained in GPRA and guided by the six national community action goals, ROMA provides a framework for continuous growth and improvement among more than 1,100 CAAs and a basis for State leadership and assistance toward those ends.

Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report

In 2005, Congress asked the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to investigate the financial oversight structure of the CSBG program. The request for the investigation was due, in part, to problems that surfaced during a GAO investigation of the Head Start Program. In many cases, CAAs administer Head Start programs and Congress questioned whether there could be problems in CSBG management that contribute to the Head Start issues.

In 2006, GAO issued a final report titled “Community Services Block Grant Program: HHS Should Improve Oversight by Focusing Monitoring and Assistance Efforts on Areas of High Risk.”¹ In the report, GAO recommends that OCS conduct a risk-based assessment of State CSBG programs, have policies and procedures to help ensure monitoring focuses on States with the highest risk, issue guidance on State monitoring requirements and training and technical assistance reporting, and implement a strategic plan to guide its training and technical assistance efforts.

OCS agreed with the recommendations and is making changes to its oversight of the CSBG program. OCS has issued guidance to the States clarifying monitoring responsibilities, hired staff with financial backgrounds, developed new monitoring tools, and is developing this strategic plan in response to GAO’s recommendations.

¹ Government Accountability Office (GAO). Community Services Block Grant: HHS Should Improve Oversight by Focusing Monitoring and Assistance Efforts on Areas of High Risk. GAO-06-627. Washington, D.C.: June 2006.

CSBG Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) 2003 Assessment

The Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) was developed to assess and improve program performance so that the Federal government can achieve better results. A PART review helps identify a program's strengths and weaknesses to inform funding and management decisions aimed at making the program more effective. PART, therefore, looks at all factors that affect and reflect program performance including program purpose and design; performance measurement, evaluations, and strategic planning; program management; and program results.

The CSBG program was assessed in 2003. The program received a "Results Not Demonstrated" rating because it lacks measures to demonstrate that it is achieving results and determine whether grantees are accountable for program results.

The Office of Community Services is currently restructuring program monitoring and evaluation to improve program administration, accountability, and outcomes of State and local agencies that serve the poor.

Legislative Authority for Training, Technical Assistance, and Capacity Building

Sections 674(b)(2) and 678E(b) of the Community Services Block Grant Act of 1981 (P.L. 97-35), as amended by the Coats Human Services Reauthorization Act of 1998 (Public Law 105-285), authorizes the Secretary to utilize a percentage of appropriated funds for training, technical assistance, and capacity building. The Coats Act permits the Secretary to carry out these activities through grants, contracts, or cooperative agreements.

At a minimum, the Secretary is required to address program capacity in specified areas – program quality (including quality of financial management practices), management information and reporting systems, and measurement of program results. The Secretary must also assure that all training, technical assistance, or capacity building activities supported by OCS are responsive to identified local needs and that input has been sought on focus and priorities from program participants.

The Coats Act requires the Secretary to distribute funds directly to eligible entities, or Statewide or local organizations or associations with demonstrated expertise in providing training to individuals and organizations on methods of effectively addressing the needs of low-income families and communities.

OCS Training and Technical Assistance Funding Priorities for CSBG

To ensure compliance with statutory requirements and account for input from CSBG program officials and participants, OCS is focusing on five training, technical assistance, and capacity building funding priorities:

- 1. Leadership Enhancement;**
- 2. Family Economic Security;**
- 3. Community Mobilization and Revitalization;**
- 4. Oversight, Financial Management and Integrity, and Risk Management; and**
- 5. Data Collection and Accountability;**

These funding priorities adopted by OCS are crosscutting and support the six national community action goals highlighted at the beginning of this report.

Priority 1 -- Leadership Enhancement

Members of the CSBG network must have the ability to incorporate strategies that effectively build the capacity of CAAs to administer the program. For example, executives, managers, and boards of directors governing CAAs must possess skills to effectively implement community-specific activities and successfully help low-income families and communities achieve greater economic security. These skills may include the ability to:

- Work cooperatively with staff, community members, and businesses to increase and sustain attention on local and national anti-poverty efforts and concerns;
- Mobilize and coordinate internal and external programs, services, and resources to improve opportunities for low-income families and communities to achieve economic security;
- Serve as key community leaders and advocates that promote the mobilization and revitalization of low-income communities;
- Understand legal and financial requirements that apply to eligible entities and secure strong administrative and fiscal control over eligible entity resources; and
- Employ performance-based management concepts as the framework for all aspects of the eligible entity's operations including program planning, resource allocation, service delivery, and program and staff evaluations.

Priority 2 -- Family Economic Security

Family Economic Security encompasses two of the six community action goals – Goal 1: Low income people become more self-sufficient and Goal 6: Low-income people, especially vulnerable

populations, achieve their potential by strengthening family and other supportive systems. These family goals speak to a variety of anti-poverty outcomes and emphasize:

- Greater economic capacity and independence for low-income families and
- Enhanced family functioning through stable, more supportive family environments and healthy marriages.

Family Economic Security is at the heart of community action's historic anti-poverty mission. Providing training, technical assistance, and capacity building resources will help CSBG officials and eligible entities achieve Goal 1 and Goal 6 as well as address the area of Family Economic Security.

Priority 3 -- Community Mobilization and Revitalization

Community Mobilization and Revitalization support three of the six community action goals – Goal 2: The conditions in which low-income people live are improved, Goal 3: Low-income people own a stake in their community, and Goal 4: Partnerships among supporters and providers of service to low-income people are achieved. These community enhancement goals complement Priority 2: Family and Economic Security in that they:

- Encourage the creation of a safe environment;
- Promote social and economic advancement; and
- Endorse collaboration between all community stakeholders.

Low-income individuals, families, and communities and their supporters play an integral role in community mobilization and revitalization. It is this interplay of community-building personal responsibility that represents the unique community action philosophy towards addressing conditions of poverty. To maximize the potential in the community in a way that effectively addresses the program and the community, training, technical assistance, and capacity building activities targeting community mobilization and revitalization must include both State and local CSBG stakeholders. Doing so will help ensure low-income families receive the opportunity and support necessary to achieve greater self-sufficiency.

Priority 4 – Oversight, Financial Management and Integrity, and Risk Management

Effective oversight, strong financial management and integrity and proactive management of risk play a critical role in ensuring eligible entities reach community action Goal 5: Agencies increase their capacity to achieve results. Most CSBG-funded local agencies are private, non-profit community-based organizations with governing boards composed of at least one-third representatives of low-income individuals and families that reside in the service area of the agency, one third elected local officials or their representatives, and the remainder representatives of other community organizations, including business, finance, faith based, or other service providers

Tripartite boards must fully participate in the development, planning, implementation and evaluation of their organization's CSBG program. However, each board member's financial skills and understanding of board roles and responsibilities and legal and financial requirements governing the eligible entity and its programs can be as diverse as the board itself. Financial management and governance training, technical assistance, and capacity building resources will help state and local CSBG officials, tripartite boards and managers of eligible entities:

- Identify potential vulnerabilities that may undermine an eligible entity's organizational and financial integrity;
- Correct legal and financial management problems before they threaten administrative and program operations; and

Ensure that eligible entities and their governing boards develop and maintain viable fiscal management controls and accountability mechanisms.

Priority 5 -- Data Collection and Accountability

Data collection and accountability also play a critical role in ensuring CAAs reach community action Goal 5: Agencies increase their capacity to achieve results. After the development of ROMA in 1994, OCS continued to pursue formal methods of performance measurement for CSBG. A CSBG statutory requirement that all States report performance outcomes by Fiscal Year 2001 was mandated in the reauthorization of the CSBG program in 1998. OCS successfully implemented this requirement with considerable training, technical assistance, and capacity-building support by OCS.

The continued refinement and maintenance of performance-based accountability standards in all States and among over 1,100 eligible entities has required ongoing OCS investment in ROMA activities. Throughout the history of ROMA, "OCS has provided training and technical assistance funding to all aspects of its implementation including:

- Grants to State and local agencies to develop model ROMA measures, strategies, and information systems;
- Grants to national, State and local entities to create training and technical assistance materials for use by the network;
- Grants to implement Statewide strategic planning and program renewal, performance measurement and reporting, expanded partnerships with other service providers;
- Grants to collect and report State and national ROMA outcome information; and
- Grants to establish and maintain national ROMA technical assistance resources including the Train-the-Trainer program, a ROMA Clearinghouse, and several agency leadership enhancement and administration improvement programs."²

² http://www.roma1.org/about_roma.asp?pid=2

ROMA has successfully helped State agencies and CAAs clarify their anti-poverty role and mission in communities, develop strategic plans to help low-income people and their communities move toward greater economic and social viability, and measure and report performance outcomes.

In Fiscal Year 2004, OCS and the CSBG Network issued standardized performance outcome measures for the most common services, activities, and programs administered by eligible entities. These standardized measures, called national indicators, provide a more accurate and aggregated national picture of CSBG activities and performance.

OCS Training, Technical Assistance, and Capacity Building Activities for CSBG

OCS training, technical assistance, and capacity building activities for CSBG reflect the five training and technical assistance funding priorities established by the Community Services Network (CSN). This approach helps OCS direct CSBG resources towards the training and technical assistance needs of States and eligible entities.

Activity 1 -- Developing, Demonstrating, and Replicating Effective Practices

OCS utilizes its training, technical assistance and capacity building authority to stimulate the creation and replication of innovative and effective leadership enhancement activities. These leadership enhancement activities focus on organizational development, strategic planning, performance measurement, and budget and performance integration. They are designed to help State CSBG administrators and CAAs achieve one or more of the six community action goals as well as develop and demonstrate the utility and efficacy of such approaches. For example, the Massachusetts Association for Community Action (MASSCAP) published the resource guide *Establishing Effective Workforce Development Programs*. The guide offers information that addresses how to plan for workforce development, work and establish partners within the workforce development system, and operate a workforce development program. The MASSCAP guide is one example of how leadership enhancement activities can produce resources that help CAAs develop skills to better assist individuals in moving toward self-sufficiency.

OCS also encourages replication of effective programs across the CSBG network. This activity is supported through training, technical assistance, and capacity building Activity 5: Promoting Knowledge Management.

Activity 2 -- Promoting Economic Security

OCS awards competitive discretionary grants to CAAs that support activities aligned with community action Goal 1: Low -income people become more self-sufficient. These activities include asset building and marriage strengthening programs that complement on-going CSBG efforts to promote economic security among low-income individuals and families. Three such programs are Assets for Independence (AFI), Health Marriage Initiative (HMI), and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

Assets For Independence (AFI)

AFI helps participants save earned income in special purpose, matched savings accounts called Individual Development Accounts (IDAs). Every dollar in savings deposited into an IDA by a participant is matched from \$1 to \$8 by AFI. The IDAs promote savings and enable participants to acquire a lasting asset after saving for a few years (e.g. first home, capitalization of a small business, post-secondary education or training). All AFI Projects participate in a national program evaluation to help determine the effectiveness of this asset-based approach to addressing poverty.

There are a number of AFI resources available to CAAs administering AFI programs. OCS authored *IDAs and CAAs: A Natural Partnership*, a technical assistance document for CAAs operating Individual Development Account Programs.³ This document provides information regarding IDAs, including State CAA Associations models of involvement, lessons learned from the field, and IDA policy suggestions.

Healthy Marriage Initiative (HMI)

The Healthy Marriage Initiative mission is “to help couples, who have chosen marriage for themselves, gain greater access to marriage education services, on a voluntary basis, where they can acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain a healthy marriage.” HMI activities include testing promising approaches to encourage healthy marriages and promote involved, committed, and responsible fatherhood by public and private entities. In FY 2005, the CSBG program funded six HMI activities through competitive, discretionary training and technical assistance grants.⁴

Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)

OCS awarded competitive discretionary grants to encourage the creation or strengthening of partnerships aimed at increasing financial education literacy and asset formation for low wage earning households. Through this initiative, OCS is providing capacity building assistance that enables local, State or regional CSBG networks to plan, establish, improve or expand the use of EITC outreach; This initiative also enables CAAs to facilitate free tax preparation services to provide asset formation and financial service opportunities for eligible individuals and families.

³ <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/assetbuilding/AFIreportCAAintro.html> and <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/assetbuilding/AFIreportCAAssec1.html>

⁴ Administration for Children and Families (2006). Healthy Marriage Initiative (HMI): Benefits of Health Marriages. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/index.html>.

OCS views such strategies as viable innovative approaches to empowering low-income individuals, and families to become more self-sufficient and self-reliant.

State CSBG Agency and State CAA Association partnerships are encouraged to pursue discretionary funding to support EITC programs as well as establish innovative collaborations. With OCS support, many CAAs have worked closely with their local Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Stakeholder Partnerships, Education and Communication (SPEC) Division to promote Earned Income Tax Credit outreach and associated free tax preparation programs. According to the IRS, in filing season 2005:

- 237 CAAs were involved in EITC outreach and free tax preparation nationwide;
- The 237 CAAs providing EITC services prepared 46,968 tax returns for low-income families resulting in \$58,166,192 in refunds (average refund \$1,238);
- Seven of the OCS grantees providing EITC services prepared 19,172 returns in their first grant year, resulting in \$12,330,580 in refunds from EITC; and
- CAAs and their local networks prepared 10.3 percent of all Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) returns (excluding military and AARP), which is the third largest percentage of any IRS national partner.⁵

Activity 3 -- Creating and Sustaining CSBG Program Resources

OCS awards competitive discretionary training and technical assistance grants aimed at creating and sustaining an array of CSBG program resources. Doing so reflects OCS' commitment to the continued development of new and existing CAAs.

Community Action Program Legal Services, Inc. (CAPLAW)

CAPLAW works to enhance the ability of CAAs to accomplish their CSBG programmatic responsibilities in a lawful manner. CAPLAW provides training for new and existing community action leaders on a variety of topics including agency organization and bylaws, board organization and responsibilities, and compliance with Federal, State, and local statutes and/or regulations. Using in-house attorneys and network of private attorneys, CAPLAW helps CAAs achieve and maintain legally sound administrative, program, and financial operations.

In an effort to improve eligible entities' oversight and encourage them to assess and manage legal risks proactively, CAPLAW has developed a self-assessment tool, the CAPLAW Legal Liability Audit, for CAAs to evaluate their compliance with requirements for nonprofit corporations and tax-exempt organizations, federal employment laws, the CSBG Act, and the Head Start Act and regulations. In addition to serving as a self-assessment tool, the audit also serves as a guide for corrective action designed to reduce the risk of liability and crisis. CAPLAW works with state associations and local attorneys in various states to train CAAs in those states, as well as personnel from the state associations and the states' CSBG offices, on use of the Legal Liability Audit. The

⁵ National Association for State Community Services Programs (NASCSPP). (January 2006). Community Action and the Earned Income Tax Credit. *NASCSPP Newsletter*, vol. 21, p. 6.

local attorneys then work individually with the CAAs to conduct the Audit and with CAPLAW to provide supplementary support.

National Association for State Community Services Programs (NASCSPP)

NASCSPP facilitates CSBG data collection, performance measurement, program operations, and program development activities. NASCSPP's four major activities include: 1) maintaining a statistical database of information regarding the program; 2) assisting States in complying with ROMA or similar performance measurement system; 3) assessing the implementation of the States' CSBG programs; and 4) providing technical assistance and training where appropriate.

One example of a NASCSPP support activity is the Information Systems (IS) survey. The IS survey collects State-level CSBG program data on the uses of CSBG funds, the sources and uses of other funding, their activities, and the number and characteristics of families. NASCSPP administers the IS survey, compiles the data, and produces an annual statistical report based on the IS survey results.

Community Action Partnership (CAP)

CAP provides CAAs with diverse educational materials and training opportunities, including resource guides and annual workshops. CAP also enlists two unique program improvement strategies, including the Award for Excellence in Community Action and Pathways to Excellence Initiative.

Award for Excellence in Community Action - This award recognizes and rewards excellence among eligible entities that can demonstrate excellence in seven organizational categories. These categories include 34 standards of excellence that encompass leadership, strategic planning, customer focus, human resources, process management, information management systems, and results. The application process requires CAAs to complete an Organizational Self-Study, submit the self-study for a third-party review of the CAAs' management system and operations, and host a peer review site visit. The Award is also a conduit that enables CAP to identify best practices throughout the CSBG Network.

Pathways to Excellence Initiative - This initiative is a capacity building strategy designed to move CAAs towards excellence. The goal of Pathways is two-fold: 1) to help CAAs set agency priorities for improvement by using the Standards of Excellence and Organizational Self-Study; and 2) to prepare CAAs to assess their readiness for the Award of Excellence in Community Action. CAAs that enroll in Pathways receive two-day training on the Standards and the methodology for conducting the self-study. The process for Pathways is the same as the Award for Excellence in Community Action, except eligible entities do not host a site visit.

Activity 4 -- Improving Fiscal Management and Integrity

OCS is focusing on the early identification of problem areas related to CSBG financial management and fiscal integrity. CAAs administer an array of programs and services according to community action plans formulated to address local needs. To improve fiscal management and

integrity, OCS is emphasizing preventative strategies to enhance the financial leadership capacity of the State and CAAs. Critical activities designed to provide leadership and program stewardship to local agencies, include board training, program governance, financial management, fiscal oversight.

OCS is also strengthening its monitoring and oversight of State CSBG authorities to ensure compliance with statutory requirements. For example, OCS developed a Monitoring Selection Process to determine which States would most benefit from an on-site monitoring visit. The result of this strategic Monitoring Selection Process is a three-year monitoring schedule, which includes on-site visits and desk monitoring (i.e. telephone assessments of State and local CSBG grantees). Coupled with the aforementioned preventative strategies, these monitoring activities will help ensure State and local CSBG administrators operate and maintain fiscally sound CSBG programs.

Activity 5 -- Promoting Knowledge Management

OCS seeks to stimulate the creation and sharing of information and knowledge among all State and local agencies that comprise the CSBG network. For example, the New York State Community Action Association (NYSCAA) established a Best Practices Clearinghouse of documents and related resources used by CAAs for fiscal management and operational purposes. The Kentucky Association for Community Action has developed a board training manual and survey process to help board members governing CAAs learn about and effectively fulfill their roles and responsibilities. CAPLAW has developed the CAA Financial Network e-Forum, a listserv that enables fiscal professionals in the CSBG network nationwide to share information, provide informal peer-to-peer assistance on financial issues, and benefit from financial experts' input.

The members of the CSBG network produce an immense amount of information regarding the CSBG program. To protect and maintain both tangible and intangible knowledge regarding CSBG resources, OCS also awarded a competitive discretionary grant to Virginia's CSBG State Association, Virginia Community Action Partnership (VACAP).

Virginia Community Action Partnership (VACAP)

VACAP promotes knowledge management by compiling and disseminating CSBG information, knowledge, and effective practices in community action programming and administration. VCAP created the website www.VirtualCap.org, which is devoted to highlighting community action programs and projects that represent best practices in community action administration and programming. The website includes a searchable database with program and project descriptions developed by CAAs from all over the nation. It is also organized by topic and location for easy access to those in the CSBG network.

With the aforementioned training, technical assistance, and capacity building activities, OCS hopes to strengthen the implementation, performance, compliance, and outcomes of Federal and State CSBG programming.

OCS Strategic Plan for CSBG Program Improvement – FY 2007-2009

OCS has undertaken three program improvement initiatives designed to support current efforts to strengthen State and local administration of the CSBG program. These improvement initiatives, which are detailed below, have a special focus on increasing the financial management capacity and fiscal integrity of CAAs.

1. Financial Management Training and Technical Assistance

OCS has the responsibility of obtaining information each fiscal year on States' uses of CSBG funds and evaluating State compliance with the provisions of the Community Services Act. To complement the skills of current program staff, OCS hired financial management professionals (financial team) to focus on improving CSBG State and local fiscal management. Three evaluation objectives direct the activities of the CSBG financial team:

1. Determine the extent to which the State's oversight of the CSBG program complied with Federal laws and standards;
2. Determine the extent to which the State's use of administrative and discretionary funds complied with Federal laws and regulations; and
3. Determine the extent to which the funds provided contributed to the goals of the CSBG program.

The new financial team developed a financial monitoring protocol to guide OCS oversight of State agencies. The protocol will be pilot tested among States to be monitored during Fiscal Year 2007 and refined for use in subsequent fiscal years. The fiscal team also developed State self-assessment tools to help State agencies measure and report their own fiscal management capacity. In addition to strengthening OCS financial management training, technical assistance, and oversight, the augmented financial management staff will develop and implement strategies for assuring fiscal control among CSBG discretionary grants.

2. OCS Monitoring of State CSBG Authorities

In August 2006, OCS established the Division of State Assistance (DSA)/Monitoring Task Force (MTF). DSA/MTF is composed of DSA staff as well as representatives from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF)/Office of Policy Research and Evaluation (OPRE) and National Association for State Community Services Programs (NASCS). DSA/MTF is responsible for developing improved strategies, including assessment documents and training tools to strengthen OCS monitoring of State CSBG Authorities. Four objectives direct the activities of the DSA/MTF:

1. Develop uniform procedures and guidelines for conducting CSBG on-site monitoring activities;
2. Develop a monitoring selection tool and establish a monitoring schedule;

3. Implement quarterly training sessions to update DSA staff on monitoring practices and procedures; and
4. Identify and incorporate best practices for monitoring States receiving CSBG funds.

To date, DSA/MTF efforts to strengthen OCS monitoring of State CSBG agencies have resulted in four major accomplishments, including:

1. Revised CSBG monitoring tools which were made available to States for review and comment;
2. Implemented a pilot test of the monitoring tools during an on-site monitoring visit in January 2007;
3. Developed procedures to improve the timeliness and quality of State monitoring reports, which were incorporated into the January 2007 on-site monitoring visit. These procedures are designed to ensure that within 60 days after monitoring visits are completed:
 - DSA staff draft State monitoring reports;
 - OCS and affected States review State monitoring reports; and
 - OCS issues a final report within 120 days after monitoring visits are completed.
4. Developed and implemented Monitoring Selection Process to determine which States would most benefit from a DSA monitoring visits. OCS will base schedules for monitoring State agencies during Fiscal Years 2007-2009 on the results of this State Monitoring Selection Process.

These efforts are designed to strengthen the CSBG monitoring procedures and focus program resources. Full implementation of the improved monitoring tools and procedures is planned for the end of Fiscal Year 2007.

3. Training and Technical Assistance Funding Accountability

OCS is developing procedures to promote greater effectiveness and accountability among projects and initiatives supported by CSBG discretionary training and technical assistance funding. Some procedures in development for implementation in Fiscal Year 2007 include:

- Revising the specifications of CSBG discretionary grant applications to require: 1) the identification of performance measures and anticipated outcomes to be achieved by grant applicants; and 2) a description of procedures to be used to collect and report results or outcomes; and
- Identifying common measures and outcomes for discretionary training and technical assistance programs intended to achieve similar and quantifiable results (e.g. grants to increase the number of low-income households that receive EITC refunds through help from local eligible entities).

Summary

The Office of Community Services (OCS) is accountable for ensuring CSBG program resources reach the intended beneficiaries and address the program's purpose of reducing poverty, revitalizing low-income communities, empowering low-income families, and assisting individuals to become self-sufficient.

This report details CSBG training, technical assistance, and capacity building activities as well as the strategic plan to be supported by Fiscal Year 2007-2009 CSBG funds. The activities and strategic plan are presented in the context of an on-going, multi-year initiative by OCS to stimulate and strengthen accountability within CSBG.

Both the training and technical assistance funding priorities and the capacity-building activities as described herein for CSBG establish a framework for enhancing CSBG program operations and increasing the program's role in reducing poverty and increasing self-sufficiency.

The adoption of the OCS Strategic Plan for CSBG Program Improvement – FY 2007-2009 has enabled OCS to lead the way for enhancing the development of CAAs and the work conducted by the CSBG network. The attention to financial management training and technical assistance, monitoring, and funding accountability will ensure a results-oriented strategy for the management and delivery of services to low-income people.

Resources

Center for Fathers, Families & Workforce Development (CFWD)

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Email: [kjacobosen@cfwd.org](mailto:kjacbosen@cfwd.org)

Community Action Partnership (CAP)

1100 17th Street, NW
Suite 500
Washington, D.C. 20036
Telephone: (202) 265-7546
Fax: (202) 265-8850
Website: <http://www.communityactionpartnership.com/>
Email: info@communityactionpartnership.com

Community Action Program Legal Services, Inc. (CAPLAW)

178 Tremont Street
Boston, MA 02111-1093
Telephone: (617) 357-6915
Fax: (617) 350-7899
Website: <http://www.capl原因.org>
Email: caplawinfo@caplaw.org

Kentucky Association for Community Action (KACA)

101 Burch Court
Frankfort, KY 40601
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Massachusetts Association for Community Action (MASSCAP)

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National Association for State Community Services Programs (NASCSPP)

400 North Capitol Street, NW

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