

CSBG Working Group – Creating CSBG’s Future

The President’s State of the Union mention of cutting and restructuring the Community Services Block Grant is now well known to us all. Shortly thereafter, senior leaders from the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families held individual meetings with the Community Action Partnership, the National Association for State Community Services Programs and the National Community Action Foundation, (they may meet with CAPLAW’s Board in June) inviting the CSBG Network’s input on next steps for CSBG. **This is a rare opportunity to create the future we want to see for CSBG, rather than having a different framework created and thrust upon us.**

The Partnership and NASCSP convened a representative group of CAAs, Associations, State CSBG offices and national partners on April 21 in Washington, DC (attendees listed below, and referred to as the CSBG Working Group) to discover common ground, discuss next steps and decide how to proceed at this challenging time.

The CSBG Working Group agreed on six core principles to guide our work going forward:

1. **Federal Accountability:** Federal oversight of States must be focused and include mechanisms for holding States accountable and correcting problems when they exist.
2. **State and Local Accountability:** The creation and definition of performance criteria that are consistent, non-arbitrary and possible for State and local grantees to meet will strengthen the CSBG Network.
3. **High Performance:** CSBG funds must be used by the locally designated community action agency to provide local and innovative responses to the causes and conditions of poverty.
4. **State Authority:** States need the authority to hold local agencies accountable and the capacity to assist them in enhancing their impact through innovation and capacity.
5. **Local Flexibility:** The Federal, State, and local model is essential with local agencies having flexibility and control to determine their priorities, based on the results of local community needs assessments and locally driven planning processes.
6. **National Infrastructure:** The infrastructure of a national network is critical. All communities, rural, suburban and urban, must have access to a local agency committed to reducing poverty, building economic opportunity and coordinating Federal, State, and local resources.

The CSBG Working Group identified five areas in which to develop concrete recommendations, each of which will engage members of the CSBG Working Group, other CSBG Network professionals, and external experts as necessary:

1. **Promotion of High Performance and Accountability via Establishment of Performance Criteria and Thresholds for Local Entities:** Recommendations for developing and defining clear criteria appropriate for a performance threshold for local entities.

2. **Promotion of High Performance and Accountability via Establishment of Performance Criteria for States:** Recommendations for developing and defining clear criteria appropriate for State accountability will be identified.
3. **Effective and Consistent Federal Oversight:** Recommendations for Federal oversight to enforce compliance at the State level, and explore options that are used for State repayment in other block grants when States are non-compliant will be examined.
4. **Standard Implementation of ROMA:** ROMA currently serves as a local diagnostic tool to fix, improve and redirect funding to other programs. The four core ROMA Activities of assessment, planning, implementing and evaluating will be looked at with an eye toward how they can be used as performance criteria and how results can be used at the local, State and Federal level to promote what works, identify promising practices and effectively target resources.
5. **Use of Evidence Based Programs in CSBG:** The CSBG Working Group will look at how evidence based programs are currently being utilized in CSBG and make recommendations for how evidence based efforts can be promoted in the future.

As part of the April 21 meeting, several next steps were outlined. It was generally agreed that there needed to be acknowledgement of the HHS/ACF solicitation for input, and that a CSBG *Network* response was more powerful than individual organization responses. A joint letter from the Partnership and NASCSP has been sent to HHS/ACF outlining this initial discussion and laying out the process of moving forward in providing more detailed input during the month of May, with final recommendations by mid-June.

The CSBG Working Group was selected to provide balanced representation from all parts of the Network: agencies, associations, state offices and national organizations. We invite you to contact any of the members listed for further information and ways to be involved going forward.

Peter Drucker noted that “the best way to predict the future is to create it,” and we agree. The network’s own MATF (Monitoring and Assessment Task Force) did this when faced with implementing the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) in 1994, and we can do this in 2011 as we face our current challenges.

CSBG Working Group

Community Action Agencies

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Northeast Florida Community Action Agency
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Teresa Cox, Executive Director
Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action
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Community Action Partnership Board Member

Tom Tenorio, Executive Director
Community Action Agency of Butte County,
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Community Action Partnership Board Member

Joe Devaney, Executive Director
Ohio Heartland CAC
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Community Action Associations

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Lana Ross, Executive Director
Iowa Community Action Association

Dalitso Sulamoyo, Executive Director
Illinois Association of Community Action
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State CSBG Offices

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