

ROMA Implementation by 2003

Regional Meeting Summary

Purpose

During July and August, the Office of Community Services (OCS), with assistance from the National Association for State Community Services Programs (NASCS), conducted five regional meetings with State CSBG directors and State association executives to:

- Work with States, one on one, to assess ROMA progress to date and create plans to complete ROMA implementation by 2003; and
- Link States to OCS-supported training opportunities, “best practices” assistance, and supplemental funding to carry out successfully their ROMA implementation plans.

In addition, OCS used the five regional meetings as forums for the exchange of information among States about a number of CSBG administration issues, including: 1) Communication among and between CAAs and State CSBG agencies and State associations; 2) CSBG coordination with other State agencies and programs; 3) The organization and functioning of CAA boards; and 4) State agency/CAA association technical assistance to CAAs. Presentations were made at each meeting on two critical issues facing the Network: 1) Early identification and assistance to “at risk” CAAs; and 2) the potential expanded role of faith-based organizations in Federally-funded social service programs.

Pre-Meeting ROMA Implementation Assessment

Prior to the five regional meetings, community action agencies in all 52 States and territories were asked to voluntarily assess their progress in implementing ROMA. Local eligible entities were asked to complete and submit an assessment instrument that focused on the four “core activities” for ROMA implementation identified by OCS in Information Memorandum #49 (February 21, 2001):

1. The entity and its board complete regular assessments of the entity’s overall mission, desired impact(s) and program structure, taking into account: 1) the needs of the community and its residents; 2) the relationship, or context, of the activities supported by the entity to other anti-poverty, community development services in the community; and 3) the extent to which the entity’s activities contribute to the accomplishment of one or more of the six ROMA national goals;
2. Based upon the periodic assessments described above, the entity and its board has identified yearly (or multi-annually) specific improvements, or results, it plans to help achieve in the lives of individuals, families, and/or the community as a whole;

3. The entity organizes and operates all its programs, services, and activities toward accomplishing these improvements, or outcomes, including linking with other agencies in the community when services beyond the scope of the entity are required. All staff are helped by the entity to understand the direct or indirect relationship of their efforts to achieving specific client or community outcomes; and
4. The entity provides reports to the State that describe client and community outcomes and that capture the contribution of all entity programs, services, and activities to the achievement of those outcomes.

Almost all (98%) community action agencies completed and returned the ROMA assessment! OCS distributed to States a composite of their CAA responses at or before the regional meetings and these composites were used as a basis for one-on-one ROMA planning between State agency/association officials and an OCS-assigned facilitator/consultant.

Combined results from all the assessments submitted indicate that:

- 1. For the first ROMA “core activity,” reexamining and recalibrating agency mission/activities in response to changing community needs --**
 - Most CAAs report a change in the organization or nature of services within the past ten years (90%);
 - Almost all CAAs have some form of a mission statement (98%); but
 - A third (34%) have *not* changed their mission statement in the past ten years.
- 2. For the second ROMA “core activity,” implementing ROMA in such a way as to identify specific improvements, or results, CAAs plan to achieve in the lives of individuals, families and/or the community as a whole –**
 - Less than half of the CAAs (47%) indicate that they have completed ROMA implementation;
 - Half have a transition plan to move toward results oriented management (51%);
 - Involvement of boards in ROMA implementation is mixed –
 - Most boards know of ROMA (85%)
 - Most boards know their agency must measure and report results (70%)
 - **Few boards have received ROMA training (18%)**
- 3. For the third “core activity,” organizing programs and services to achieve client or community outcomes related to one or more of the six community action national goals –**

- Almost all CAAs appear to organize and keep records by programs, or funding sources, rather than around client or community goals/anticipated outcomes (96%);
 - Most use “quantitative” data to measure program outcomes (88%);
 - **Less than half of the CAAs measure outcomes for all their programs (46%) (which may indicate that they apply ROMA to CSBG funded-services only);**
 - More than half of the CAAs collect outcome data on all clients (60%); and
 - While almost all agencies have efforts to address community growth and change (94%), **a far fewer percentage measure community improvement outcomes (59%).**
- 4. For the fourth “core activity,” timely reporting of outcomes for one or more of the six national community action goals –**
- More than half of the CAAs report all their accomplishments/outcomes (60%)
 - Most that do such reports use numbers or percentages (75%);
 - **When CAAs submit their CSBG plans, almost all project ROMA outcomes (90%).**
 - The extent of outcome information used in other CAA reports is mixed:
 - Very few fiscal reports contain outcomes (21%)
 - Even fewer board reports contain outcomes (18%)
 - More than half use outcome data/language in fundraising documents (56%)

State ROMA Implementation Planning

As indicated, OCS provided an opportunity for State CSBG directors and State CAA association executives to work with a facilitator/consultant at the regional meeting to assess ROMA implementation to date and plan activities to complete implementation by 2003. Each State delegation (CSBG and CAA association officials) was encouraged to identify candidates (State or local) to participate in one or more national training/technical assistance initiatives to be funded by OCS (including a national academy in CAA administration and financial management, two leadership training programs, peer-to-peer interventions for “at risk” CAAs, and a ROMA train-the-trainers program). State delegations were also encouraged to apply for grants under the FY 2001 or FY 2002 OCS Training, Technical Assistance and Capacity Building program to underwrite ROMA implementation activities not covered by the training opportunities described above.

As a result of these one-on-one discussions among State CSBG directors, State CAA association leaders and OCS facilitators, most States developed plans for completing ROMA implementation by 2003.

Among the most common elements of these plans are:

- **Moving Beyond ROMA Basics**

A significant number of States have provided basic ROMA training to their CAAs over the past several years. More often than not, this training has focused on the measurement and reporting aspects of performance management, including how to use “outcome” language to describe agency activities. As a result of such training, these States have begun to collect “ROMA data” for some, most, or all of their CAAs and report the data to NASCSP/OCS on an annual basis.

States that have trained their CAAs in the “basics” developed plans at the regional meetings to move their efforts beyond measurement, expand understanding of ROMA as a tool for agency revitalization, and increase acceptance of ROMA among community action leaders at the State and local level. Among the activities included in their plans are:

1. **Getting all CAAs to a higher level of proficiency in understanding and using outcome measures;**
2. **Expanding the application of ROMA beyond CSBG-funded programs in CAAs to all programs and activities that contribute to the achievement of one or more of the six national goals;**
3. **Getting those CAAs resistant to ROMA implementation to “buy” into it through exposure to the underlying reasons for its use in community action and the ways it can help improve agency work and performance; and**
4. **Completing work on State-wide ROMA initiatives, such as the design and installation of scales or other measurements of family development, self-sufficiency, agency functioning, or community development to be used by all CAAs in the State.**
5. **Exposing CAAs to ROMA information and activities in other States as a means of increasing understanding, acceptance, and adoption;**
6. **Training CAA Boards in the use of ROMA to strengthen their capacity to help define agency mission, set performance targets, and determine agency outcomes.**
7. **Increasing the capability to teach and sustain ROMA-based management through enrollment of one or more State or local CAA staff in “train-the-trainer” programs.**

- **Strengthening Agency Capabilities**

A number of States identified the need to increase their ability to address the two ROMA goals focused on agency outcomes, Goals 4 and 5. These States included in their ROMA plans such activities as:

1. **Developing approaches/outcomes to measure agency performance;**
2. **Enrolling one or more State or CAA staff in OCS-funded national agency improvement programs, including the Community Action National Academy (CAA administration and financial management), leadership training (Move the Mountain or EDI), or peer-to-peer intervention (Mid-Iowa CAA);**
3. **Providing basic management training to CAA Boards to increase their capacity to contribute to, and oversee, all aspects of CAA operations, including agency needs assessment, planning, program operation, evaluation, and reporting;**
4. **Expanding coordination between the State CSBG agency and the State CAA association to accomplish a variety of goals, including ROMA implementation; and**
5. **Using ROMA as a vehicle for greater outreach to, and coordination with, other programs that focus on such goals as self-sufficiency and community development at the State and community levels.**

As a result of the ROMA planning activities that occurred at the five regional meetings, over 30 State CSBG agencies/CAA State associations submitted request for, and received, OCS grants in September to help accomplish the work described above.

Roundtable Discussions of CSBG Administration

OCS asked State delegations at the regional meetings (State CSBG officials, State CAA association leaders, and a number of CAA administrators) to share with colleagues from other States, how they address four CSBG administration issues that were raised by the Congress during reauthorization of the CSBG in 1998:

1. How do State agencies/associations know what is going on in local programs (monitoring and oversight)?
2. How do State agencies/associations help local programs improve performance and outcomes (technical assistance)?
3. How do State agencies/associations assure that CAA Boards are appropriately constituted and carryout their leadership and oversight responsibilities? And

4. How do State agencies/associations coordinate with other programs/offices at the State level that share common purposes with community action?

Among the highlights and common themes from the twelve roundtable discussions conducted at the regional meetings are:

- **Monitoring and Oversight**

1. Almost all State CSBG agencies conduct formal, compliance-type reviews of local programs through periodic visits (some annually, others every two or three years). All indicated they use formal plans, written narrative and fiscal reports to keep track of program activity.
2. While some State CSBG agencies look at all programs administered by a CAA when they conduct site visits, most just focus on CSBG or those programs they are responsible for at the State level (i.e. LIHEAP, Weatherization);
3. More than half of the State CSBG officials described having a cordial, informal relationship with State Association directors and staff. They reported that they are routinely involved in State Association meetings or training programs and use such events to learn and share information with local program officials. A number of CSBG State officials, however, described a more formal relationship with both State CAA associations and their membership. In such circumstances, State CSBG attendance and/or participation was on an invitation basis only.
4. Almost all State delegations indicated that local agencies that might be experiencing program, administration, or financial difficulties, would more likely share such information with the State CAA association than with the State CSBG authority.
5. Financial audits, often conducted by a stand-alone agency of State government, often provide the CSBG State authority with information about the status of local agencies. Similarly, some State officials are informed of the findings of on-site compliance monitoring of State or Federal program staff for programs that fund community action services, such as Head Start, WIC, TANF, and WIA. This kind of information sharing is uneven across States, however.
6. State CSBG authorities with strong, on-going, and informal relationships with their CAA association counterparts and local CAA officials reported that they were likely to know of local agency problems “before reading about them in the newspaper.” These authorities used and trusted informal means of keeping in touch (e-mail, phone conversations, non-monitoring visits, etc) over the more formal, compliance-focused methods of monitoring and oversight.

- **Technical Assistance**

1. A significant number of State CSBG agencies have sponsored ROMA training over the past several years.
2. Most program focused technical assistance takes place at quarterly or semi-annual meetings of State CAA associations through workshops and speaker presentations.
3. On-site monitoring visits are used by some States to assist local CAAs with administration and compliance issues.
4. Several States have community action newsletters, often published by the State CAA association, that share information about programs and “best practices” within a State.
5. A few States have specific initiatives to help train new agency leaders/executive directors. Some assign a “seasoned” CAA executive director to “mentor” a new director.
6. Significant technical assistance or sharing of information about community action programming is conducted through State-wide staffing organizations, such as financial managers, case workers/social workers, data managers, etc.

- **Coordination Across Programs, Between State Agency and State CAA Association**

1. The extent to which State CSBG authorities coordinate with other programs in State government depends on a variety of political, and “cultural” factors:
 - In many States, CSBG funding is too small, or the responsibility is so “buried,” that influencing the organization and direction of other community action funding sources is difficult, if not impossible.
 - Some State CSBG officials have used ROMA goals and performance measurement approaches to reach out to other State community development or self-sufficiency programs to coordinate funding and service strategies.
 - Governor support for community action in general, or self-sufficiency/community development efforts in particular, varies among States and correlates strongly with the CSBG official’s ability to work across programs and offices within State government.
 - Similarly, the extent of State influence on the behavior and public programs of local communities directly affects the extent to which

State CSBG agencies work with other State offices and the nature of relations with local CAA officials. Where there is a tradition of strong State government, a number of CSBG officials reported having major opportunities to participate in, and influence, broader anti-poverty and community development activities at the State and local levels. Conversely, representatives from States with traditions of strong local control and weak State governments indicated fewer opportunities to influence such efforts.

2. Organizational location often influences the ability of State CSBG authorities to coordinate with other programs and offices in State government:
 - When high ranking officials of State agencies, or individuals that oversee a number of programs, have the responsibility for CSBG, it is more likely that the program will be coordinated with broader efforts to promote “self-sufficiency” or community development;
 - When CSBG authority is located in the Office of the Governor, or of a State cabinet official, then coordination attempts are more likely to occur and succeed;
 - When CSBG authority is located within a State agency responsible for community or economic development, the social service program either “stands out like a sore thumb,” or, more positively, is in an organizational climate supportive of community action self-sufficiency and community change goals;
 - When, as in most cases, CSBG is located in State health and/or human service agencies, its relative small size may cause it to be “lost” among bigger programs and initiatives that serve similar purposes, or less able to assert influence to achieve the broader community action goals of promoting self-sufficiency or community development.
3. Coordination between State CSBG authorities and State CAA associations varies across the country.

When agencies and associations work closely together, they have:

- **Influenced State funding initiatives and allocations** -- State CAA associations have been able to advocate for greater funding of community action with State governors and legislatures, help State CSBG officials link with other State programs and offices, channel State self-sufficiency and community development initiatives to community action agencies. In one State, the CAA association played a critical role in designing legislation that eventually channeled a significant emergency assistance initiative to the State CSBG authority

to administer through local CAAs. Similar collaborations between State CSBG and State CAA officials have focused legislative action on community action family development initiatives.

- **Influenced the location and span of influence of State CSBG authority** – Several State delegations reported that the State CAA association helped the CSBG authority improve their location and span of control within State government. In addition, other States reported that local CAAs, acting either independently or in concert with their State association, “opened doors” for State CSBG officials to offices that manage other State programs that fund community action.
- **Assuring the Composition and Role of CAA Boards**

Almost all State delegations to the regional meetings indicated that more needs to be done to help CAA boards carry out their leadership and stewardship activities. The pre-meeting assessment of ROMA implementation completed by 98% of all CAAs focused on board training in general, and ROMA orientation in particular, as the largest unmet need.

The highlights of the discussion of board composition, functioning, and training include:

- **Composition compliance is monitored by most States** – Almost all State CSBG officials indicated that they examine State CSBG plans to make sure that CAA tripartite boards are composed of the appropriate mix of representatives of the poor, elected officials, and other community organizations. Some indicated that they met with Boards when doing site-visits to assure that the roster presented in plans is the true board membership. Some State officials did indicate, however, that they did not scrutinize whether those board members who are supposed to represent the poor are indeed such representatives, especially if they have not been elected or have been on the board of many years (some reported 20-25 year memberships);
- **Board functioning is monitored, but not greatly influenced to date** – Many State CSBG officials reported that they attend board meetings to see how the board relates to their CAA and its executive staff. These State officials indicated that the extent to which boards truly oversee the plans, activities, and outcomes of CAAs varies across agencies. They suggested that their best agencies are those with appropriately functioning boards. They also expressed the view that a significant number of boards do not assert their appropriate role with agencies, either because of lack of knowledge about their statutorily-defined authorities, or because of a dominating executive director and/or staff. Many State officials thought they could and should influence board functioning among their CAAs, but thought that it would be difficult to do in situations involving local

executive director opposition. As indicated, most States have identified board training, in both general operations and ROMA, as a priority in their ROMA implementation planning.

- **Training boards presents special challenges** – A significant number of State delegations indicated that training board members poses special challenges, including:
 1. Board members, especially in rural areas, have to travel long distances to meetings, and would have to do so for training;
 2. Most board members have jobs and may not be able to get off from work for training;
 3. Board members that work would have to be compensated for time and potential loss of wages due to attendance at training.

Next Steps

As a result of their participation in the OCS regional meetings, 49 States and territories have developed plans to complete ROMA implementation by 2003. Over 30 State CSBG agencies and/or State CAA associations have received OCS grants that underwrite training and technical assistance activities to achieve the ROMA implementation goal.

In addition, a number of participating States will have an opportunity to enroll State and/or local community action officials in the many OCS-funding national training programs described in this memorandum.

OCS anticipates that additional States may identify funding needs to complete ROMA implementation and plans to make such funds available through a FY 2002 grant competition in the near future.

Finally, through its regional meetings, OCS hopes to have forged new or strengthened working relationships among all partners in the Community Services Network. Of particular importance will be to sustain the cooperative nature of Federal-State relations evident at the meetings, as well as the day-to-day collaborations of State CSBG agency and CAA association as they work with local CAAs across the Nation.