



National Association for State Community Services Programs

Center for Community Action Research

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CSBG Reauthorization: NASCSP's Position

Background

The National Association for State Community Services Programs (NASCSPP) represents all 52 state and territory administrators of the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG). The CSBG, administered by the states, provides core funding for the anti-poverty efforts of the nationwide Community Services Network. As the only mandated anti-poverty network in the country, it is composed of more than 1,120 local community agencies, most of them Community Action Agencies (CAAs), covering 96 percent of the counties in the U.S. The Community Services Network has created, coordinated and delivered a broad array of comprehensive services to low-income Americans, for over 30 years.

Recommendations

In order for the Community Services Network to be effective in alleviating poverty, the following recommendations should be included in the new CSBG legislation:

- ◆ **The new CSBG legislation should retain language, which allots up to five percent of the block grant for administrative purposes.** The five percent administrative allotment is essential to the efficiency, innovation, and accountability of the CSBG. Currently states use the 5 percent allotment to: provide regular training and technical assistance (T&TA) to grantees; maintain strong relationships with Boards of Directors; actively contribute to the national solutions; provide leadership in cost effective information technology solutions; develop timely and customized T&TA and training tools; and provide CSBG presence within the executive branch of state government.
- ◆ **NASCSP strongly discourages the inclusion of language regarding moving the state CSBG Offices to the Governor's office and/or into any other new location.** Presently Governors have jurisdiction over where within the state's organizational structure CSBG is located. In order to maintain efficient use of funds it is essential to preserve the block grant qualities of the CSBG by continuing to allow Governors to have this discretion. Federal legislation specifying the location of the CSBG Office within the state would infringe upon the nature of a block grant as well as the states' prerogative and ability to do good work.

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- ◆ **The CSBG legislation should retain language, which specifies that grantees of the CSBG must have governing boards, which include representation from low-income residents, elected officials, and business and community leaders.** The effective nature and essence of the CSBG and therefore community action comes from the fact that local decisions are arrived at locally. Cross-section community representation ensures that boards have knowledge of the needs of the particular community being served. If the CSBG Reauthorization does not retain this language the community accountability and grass roots empowerment will be lost.
 - ◆ **NASCSP strongly encourages the inclusion of language, which would significantly increase the authority of the public community action agencies' advisory boards.** This would allow them to more effectively react to the needs of select communities and to stimulate innovation often impeded within the local government structure.
 - ◆ **NASCSP strongly encourages the inclusion of language, which would allow public community action agencies to privatize if and when necessary.**
 - ◆ **Currently CSBG leads the way in the area of performance standards and outcome measures. Language allowing this cutting edge result oriented work to continue to be developed and implemented at the state and local level should be retained.** The six national Result Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) goals allow for national continuity while facilitating local control over the development of outcome measures and benchmarks. This is essential to the success of the CSBG in providing services to the low-income population.
 - ◆ **NASCSP strongly encourages the inclusion of language, which would allow states to raise CSBG eligibility to 150 percent of the poverty line.** Allowing states increased discretion over CSBG eligibility would provide opportunities for states and their CAA networks to partner and collaborate in new and effective ways.
 - ◆ **NASCSP strongly discourages repealing the Hatch Act restrictions.** These restrictions protect agencies and personnel from potential political conflicts that distract them from focusing on serving the low-income population.

A Community-Based Approach to Poverty Alleviation

The CSBG moves low-income populations out of poverty to self-sufficiency by providing a variety of comprehensive, outcome driven services. These include self-sufficiency case management, employment, education, income management, health, transportation, housing, nutrition, linkages to other resources, senior citizen services, youth development, and emergency services. \$531 million in federal and state CSBG funding leveraged over \$6.4 billion in other federal, state, local and private resources in 1999. Each CSBG dollar leveraged \$4.32 in non-federal funds.

In 1999 alone, the Community Services Network reached about one-fifth of persons in poverty within their communities. Nearly half of their clients were severely poor, defined as having incomes below 75 percent of the poverty guideline (\$10,410 for a family of three). 1.8 million of the clients served by Community Action Agencies were working poor or retired worker families. In addition, a total of 2.4 million children in approximately 1.7 million families were served. Of these families, over one million were headed by single parents, and nearly three-quarter million were low-income, two parent families.

As a grassroots network, the Community Services Network is an integral component of communities and functions as a hub for services to low-income people. All of the agencies in the network are governed by a tri-partite board consisting of one-third elected public officials and at least one-third representatives of the low-income community. The balance is made up of leaders from the private sector, including businesses, faith-based groups, charities, and civic organizations. Because of this community-based approach to poverty alleviation, the Community Services Network has been able to serve low-income populations across the country for over 35 years. The CSBG allows for the resources, flexibility and experience to provide services and deliver the outcomes that low-income populations need to become self-sufficient.

Vital Partnerships - Welfare Reform

The Community Services Network has proven to be an effective partner for state welfare reform efforts by providing supportive services such as housing, health care, childcare, and transportation that assist families in moving off welfare and toward self-sufficiency. Approximately fifty percent of the Community Services Network is working in partnership with TANF state offices. These efforts are more critical than ever as it is becoming clear that leaving welfare is not synonymous with leaving poverty. TANF caseloads are increasingly composed of "difficult to serve" families with multiple and severe barriers. Recent research indicates that as many as 40 percent of welfare leavers are still not employed, and child poverty rates have not fallen as quickly as the number of children on welfare. In order for the Community Services Network to continue to be a vital partner to TANF in assisting families moving off welfare, funding must be maintained to support these efforts.

Outcomes

Much of the success of the Community Services Network in alleviating poverty is due to its commitment to an outcome-driven management strategy. Since the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, the Network has used Results-Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) to set goals and evaluate outcomes. ROMA provides a flexible structure of six national goals within which local governments and agencies set appropriate objectives. With this framework, agencies can show the outcomes they are achieving with CSBG funds, as well as the results of other programs they provide to help low-income families and communities move from poverty to self-sufficiency.

Examples of Success

Innovative models of family self-sufficiency, poverty reduction and preventative efforts are the hallmark of CSBG. CSBG grantees have historic roots in local communities, which allow them to partner with other local community and faith-based organizations to deliver a wide range of programs that promote self-sufficiency. Examples of some of the many innovative programs provided by the network are listed below.

- ◆ Of the 442 homeless households served at a community action agency in Oregon, 80 received temporary housing to meet their immediate needs and 212 obtained permanent housing in FY 2000.
- ◆ In Minnesota, 39 community action agencies leveraged \$9 million worth of volunteer hours from local community members and CSBG consumers, thereby ensuring that low-income people have a stake in their communities.

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- ◆ In Tulsa, Oklahoma, the Individual Development Account (IDA) Matched Savings Program at Community Action Project of Tulsa County helped low-income people become more self-sufficient by providing over 150 clients with the knowledge and means to begin to accrue assets such as homes, small businesses or capitalization, education or retirement.
 - ◆ As a response to the community's need, the Fayette County Community Action Agency in Pennsylvania established the Community Medical Services clinic in 1997. This primary care center improves the conditions in which low-income people live by providing a full range of medical services, including immunization, regular exams, treatment of chronic conditions, and blood tests to patients without health insurance.
 - ◆ A community action agency in Nebraska helped low-income families maintain stable housing by improving the physical condition of housing through the weatherization of 168 units in FY 2000.
 - ◆ Since 1988 CAP Services, Inc. has helped over 130 low-income clients own a stake in their own community and work toward greater self-sufficiency by providing services which allow them to start up and maintain micro enterprises through the use of a Virtual Business Incubator in the counties of Marquette, Outagamie, Portage, Waupaca, and Waushara in Wisconsin.

In FY 2001 low-income clients in Missouri received free Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) assistance through local community action agencies. This resulted in over 3,000 low-income families with children receiving over \$3.5 million in refunds last year alone.