
A State Organizational Patterns and Programs Coordination Survey Project

Final Report



**Prepared by the Community Action Association
of Pennsylvania**

With assistance from the National Association for State
Community Services Programs

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Executive Summary

The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) is a federal, anti-poverty block grant that funds the operations of a state-administered network of local agencies. The status of CSBG as a block grant means that the federal government provides CSBG funding directly to each state, rather than to individual Community Action Agencies. The CSBG network includes 1,086 local agencies that create, coordinate and deliver programs and services to low-income Americans across the country. Today, CSBG is composed of a network of state and local partners working together to address the issues of poverty. Included in this network are three major partner groups: Community Action Agencies (CAAs); State Community Action Associations; and State CSBG Offices.

This report is the result of a grant funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Community Services to The Community Action Association of Pennsylvania (CAAP) to research the placement of the Community Services Block Grant office within state government. In conducting this research, CAAP, with assistance from the National Association for State Community Services Programs (NASCS), designed a survey instrument to collect data related to the effectiveness and the location of the Community Services Block Grant office. This research attempts to determine whether the location of the office has an impact on the ability of state administrators to form effective working partnerships at the state and local level. Survey responses were collected from all 50 states and the District of Columbia, state associations and a sample of community action agencies.

The results indicate significant national trends regarding budgetary issues, the downsizing of state government, and early retirement. In addition, responses identified the strengths and opportunities for advancement in areas such as collaborating, advocating within state government, advocating to state legislature, advocating with other parties, providing assistance in developing private partnerships, and providing quality training and technical assistance. Findings show that all network partners perceive that there is a strong relationship between CAAs and the state office.

The report also analyzes responses to the survey in terms of the location of the state office. Findings indicate that while there is no one ideal locale for a CSBG office within state government, many would prefer to be located in the governor's office. In actuality there are only a couple states with CSBG offices located within the governor's office. Therefore it is difficult to report on the effectiveness of placing the CSBG office within that location. This leads to the conclusion that the effectiveness of an office is reliant upon the abilities of the CSBG office staff.

Overview

The Community Services Block Grant Program

The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) is a federal, anti-poverty block grant that funds the operations of a state-administered network of local agencies. The CSBG network includes 1,086 local agencies that create, coordinate and deliver programs and services to low-income Americans in 96% of the nation's counties.

Most local agencies in the CSBG network are Community Action Agencies (CAAs), created through the Economic Opportunity Act, a predecessor of the CSBG. Community representation and accountability are hallmarks of CAAs, where agencies are governed by a tri-partite board. This board structure consists of elected public officials, representatives of the low-income community and appointed leaders from the private sector.

Because the CSBG funds the central management and core activities of these agencies, they are able to mobilize additional resources to combat the central causes of poverty. In FY 2002, nearly **\$9.8 billion** in resources was leveraged by the **\$579 million** in direct CSBG support for local agencies. This means that every CSBG dollar was matched by over \$15.52 in funding from other federal, state, local and private sources.

CSBG is typically not the largest single funding source for an individual CAA and does not usually represent a majority of the funds available to individual agencies. However, CSBG does provide an organizational and structural framework, including requirements for the membership of the board of directors, which has an impact on CAAs that goes far beyond the dollars provided to each agency.

The Community Action Network

Today, CSBG is composed of a network of state and local partners working together to address the issues of poverty. Included in this network are three major partner groups:

- Community Action Agencies – These locally governed organizations are the chief recipients of CSBG fund and provide direct services aimed at addressing poverty issues across the nation.
- State Community Action Associations – These formalized affiliations of Community Action Agencies within a state serve to provide member agencies with a range of services including statewide training and technical assistance, advocacy on a statewide basis on issues important to CAAs, a mechanism for sharing “best practices” in program operations and a host of related services.
- State CSBG Offices – The state CSBG offices serve to ensure that the requirements of the CSBG Act are adhered to and that the state and CAAs will

participate in the Results Oriented Management and Accountability performance measurement system.

The States' Responsibilities

CSBG's status as a block grant means that the federal government provides CSBG funding directly to each state, rather than to individual Community Action Agencies. As stated in the most recent reauthorization of the CSBG Act, (the Community Opportunities, Accountability, and Training and Educational Services Act of 1998), the federal government is, "...authorized to...make grants ...to States to ameliorate the causes of poverty in communities within the States."

The 1998 reauthorization of the block grant also describes how each state must establish a structure to implement CSBG by stating:

"...The chief executive officer of a State...shall designate...an appropriate State agency...to act as a lead agency for purposes of carrying out State activities...(proscribed by the CSBG Act)."

Thus, each state determines for itself the best location and structure for a "lead agency" to administer CSBG.

In addition, the CSBG Act requires each state to adopt a state plan that provides assurances that the state will,

- "...make more effective use of, and ...coordinate with, other programs... (including State welfare reform efforts)..."
- "...coordinate, and establish linkages between, governmental and other social services programs to assure the effective delivery of such services to low-income individuals..."
- "...ensure coordination between anti-poverty programs in each community in the State..."
- "...to the maximum extent possible, coordinate programs with and form partnerships with other organizations serving low-income residents..."

These state office responsibilities—to coordinate efforts with other programs, to develop linkages among CAAs and other agencies and to ensure that anti-poverty efforts are supported by strong partnerships among service providers—are important contributors to the successful outcomes achieved by the Community Action network.

State Organizational Patterns and Programs Coordination Project

The Community Action Association of Pennsylvania (CAAP) received funds from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Community Services to research the placement of the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) office within state government. In conducting this research, CAAP, with the assistance of NASCSP, designed surveys to draw responses that were used to analyze the impact of the location of the CSBG office within state government. The survey was distributed to all the states, state CAA associations and a sample of Community Action Agencies.

CAAP and NASCSP, in conjunction with a taskforce comprised of representatives from state CSBG offices, State CAA Associations, CAAs, national partners, and the National Governors Association, has developed this survey project in an effort to gather data regarding state CSBG office “lead agencies.” A primary purpose of this survey project is to gauge the relative merits of designating a CSBG “lead agency” in different locations within state government.

Survey questionnaires were used to gather detailed information regarding the location of state CSBG offices and how the location of an office impacts the ability of a state CSBG administrator to fulfill statutory responsibilities. The survey gathered data on the functional locations of the CSBG office in state government, identified those that best support efforts of the network to create and sustain partnerships at the state and local levels, and identified the apparent pros and cons of placing the CSBG office under other functional units of government.

A longer version of the survey was also used to gather more anecdotal information regarding the state CSBG office’s location and the impact it has on the state’s ability to form effective partnerships, provide training and technical assistance and leverage opportunities for the network.

Methodology

Survey questionnaires were distributed to the three major partner groups (CAAs, state CAA Associations and state CSBG offices). All three versions of the surveys were sent electronically via email. CSBG directors received the survey via the CSBG directors list serve administered by NASCSP. CSBG directors from all 50 states, American Samoa, District of Columbia and Puerto Rico subscribe to the list serve. State associations received the survey through the CSBG partners list serve administered by Wanda DeBruler and is distributed to over 100 individuals nationally. Finally, 619 CAAs with registered information at NASCSP received the survey electronically by email.

A total of 103 responses were returned: 39 from CAAs, 23 from state CAA Associations and 41 from state CSBG offices.

Additional requests for supplemental questionnaires were mailed to respondents from 23 states of which 7 CAAs, 2 state CAA Associations, and 8 CSBG directors submitted information.

National Trends

Nearly every state CSBG office is facing changes that challenge its ability to meet its statutory responsibilities. State governments across the country are struggling with looming budget problems. Many states are actively downsizing state government in an effort to keep finances under control. State spending is being reduced for an increasingly large number of programs and initiatives. Personnel at the state level (as well as at the local level) are being regularly asked to continue to do more with less as a way to maintain needed government services.

“We've moved four times in the past seven years, including three different executive branch agencies. It has been important to have enough infrastructure within the state CSBG office to keep the program flowing smoothly despite the disruptions in the organizational chart.”

State CSBG Director Respondent

In addition, many states are using early retirement incentives as a way to reduce personnel costs. Although such efforts can help reduce expenses, early retirement can also adversely affect programs such as CSBG by hastening a brain drain of experienced and skilled individuals from the Community Action network.

These national trends are likely to continue for the foreseeable future, making the job of state CSBG offices increasingly challenging.

Where the CSBG Office Is Located Today

“The biggest factor that contributes to an effective state CSBG office is the leadership. If they come into the job with knowledge of the low-income community, if they understand and believe in the mission of CAAs, then things go very well. Without good leadership, it really doesn't matter where the office is.”

CAA Respondent

According to data from the CSBG-IS report for FY 2002, the Community Services Block Grant funds all or part of 578 positions in 48 states' administrative structures; forty-seven states reported their CSBG-funded employees' time was the equivalent of about 254 state employees (FTEs).

A listing of the departments responsible for administering the CSBG is shown below in Table 1 and is divided into four broad groupings:

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- Human Services Agencies – Those that administer public assistance and income support programs;
- Community Economic Development – Those that administer community and local programs to address housing and neighborhood economic development;
- Office of the Governor – Special executive offices assigned anti-poverty program responsibilities;
- Other – Those that primarily administer employment and job or business development programs, or other state agencies.

Table 1 Administrative Location of State CSBG Program Office, FY 2004 in 49 States, DC and Puerto Rico (CSBG IS 2002 Data, Updated by Survey Responses)		
Department	State	No. of States
Human Resources, Social Services, Human Services	AR, AZ, CT, DC, DE, GA, ID, IN, KY, ME, MI, MO, MS, MT, NC, NE, NH, NM, NV, PR, RI, SD, TN, VA, VT, WI, WY	27
Community Services, Community Affairs, Community Economic Development	AL, CA, CO, FL, IL, MD, MA, NJ, ND, OH, OK, OR, PA, TX, UT, WA	16
Office of the Governor	SC, WV	2
Other	HI, IA, KS, LA, MN, NY	6

Other Programs Administered by State CSBG Offices

Just as local CAAs administer a number of federal and state programs for their communities in conjunction with the CSBG, so do many state CSBG offices. Table 2 shows the number of states administering the various programs.

All together, the State CSBG offices administered 233 programs. As shown in Table 2, nearly all state CSBG offices also administered the HHS Community Food and Nutrition Program. Twenty-one CSBG administrators reported that they administered at least some part of the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), and 18 reported that they administered the Department of Energy Weatherization Assistance Program (DOE/WAP). Eighteen CSBG administrators were responsible for one or more Housing and Urban Development (HUD) programs, and seven ran additional federal programs for the homeless. Twenty-eight of the state CSBG offices had responsibility for other federal or state programs, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) self-sufficiency initiatives, state housing and homelessness programs, state energy programs, refugee assistance, safe drinking water, childcare support and/or domestic violence-related services. Together, they managed 106 such additional efforts.

Table 2 Other Federal Programs Directed by CSBG Administrators, FY 2002 in 48 States, DC and Puerto Rico (Data from CSBG IS, FY 2002)	
Programs	Number of States
Community Food and Nutrition Program	48
Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)	21
Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP)	18
Housing and Urban Development Programs (HUD)	18
Other Federal Homeless Programs	7
USDA Nutrition and Other	10
Head Start	5
Other Programs (106)	27

Like the CAAs themselves, state CSBG offices can serve as a focal point for other state and federal efforts aimed at low-income people. State CSBG offices can bring together, at a state level, a network of agencies (including CAAs) and service delivery systems that address the issues of poverty. State CSBG offices thus have the potential to play a critical role in the development of a cohesive network of CAAs and their partners for the effective and efficient delivery of services to low-income people.

Survey Results

“States are very different in their state government structures. What would be a good placement in one state might not be good in another. What might be good in a particular state in a specific period of time might change over time. These are state by state issues. We have a good working relationship in (our state) between DHS and the CAAs. Of note is the joint effort to recently produce (our state’s) poverty report.”

CAA Respondent

State Office Ratings in Several Key Areas

The State Organizational Patterns and Programs Survey asked respondents to rate the state office in several key areas. Using a scale of 1 - 5 (1 being “weak” and 5 being “strong”), respondents to the survey were asked to rate their state office on its ability to:

- Collaborate with other state agencies
- Advocate on behalf of local CAAs within state government
- Advocate on behalf of local CAAs to members of state legislature
- Advocate on behalf of local CAAs to other parties (universities, private institutions, foundations, etc.)
- Provide eligible entities with assistance in securing private partnerships
- Provide quality training and technical assistance (T/TA) support to local CAAs.

The survey also asked respondents to rate the relationship between the state office and

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local CAAs (again, using the same 5-point scale).

We first looked at survey responses by CAA network group - CAAs themselves, state CAA Associations, and state CSBG offices:

Data from survey respondents indicate that state CSBG offices are viewed most favorably in terms of their overall relationships with Community Action Agencies. Community Action Agencies and state CSBG directors alike rated this key relationship as the highest ranked area for which survey responses were sought. It is also remarkable to note that the average response score for state CSBG directors of 4.49 (on a scale of 1 to 5) was virtually identical to the average response score for CAAs of 4.50. It appears that both the state CSBG offices and CAAs alike rate their working relationship as a strength.

“The state CSBG director works closely with the state CAP Association regarding processes, forms, reporting, ROMA, etc. We see ourselves as partners, and we assist each other.”

CAA Respondent

“The state is in a position to be a 'ready responder' ...they have immediate access to issues and problems and because of our great relationship, we get feedback on issues almost immediately.”

CAA Respondent

State CAA Associations rate the state CSBG offices higher than either the CAAs or the state CSBG directors themselves. In every category surveyed, the CAA Association ranked the state office as stronger than either of the other two partners.

“We do not always agree with our CAAs or with the state partnership. We have a healthy tension—we need them, respect them, listen to them, fund them, collaborate with them and, as often as possible, we accommodate their requests.”

State CSBG Director Respondent

Community Action Agencies ranked the CSBG office higher in ability to advocate for CAAs in the state legislature than did the state CSBG directors themselves. However, the CAAs ranked the state offices lower than the directors in the state offices' ability to collaborate with other state agencies, advocate for CAAs with other state agencies, advocate for CAAs with other non-state agencies and organizations, and assist CAAs in securing private partnerships. CAAs gave the lowest average score of 2.54 in rating the state CSBG offices' ability to assist them in developing partnerships.

“The state, oftentimes, imposes additional regulations on state departments which slows the overall process down. It gets done, just not very expediently. Having state oversight, as well as federal, creates an awful lot of bureaucratic hoops to jump through. It's a good thing for accountability; it's a bad thing for providing timely services.”

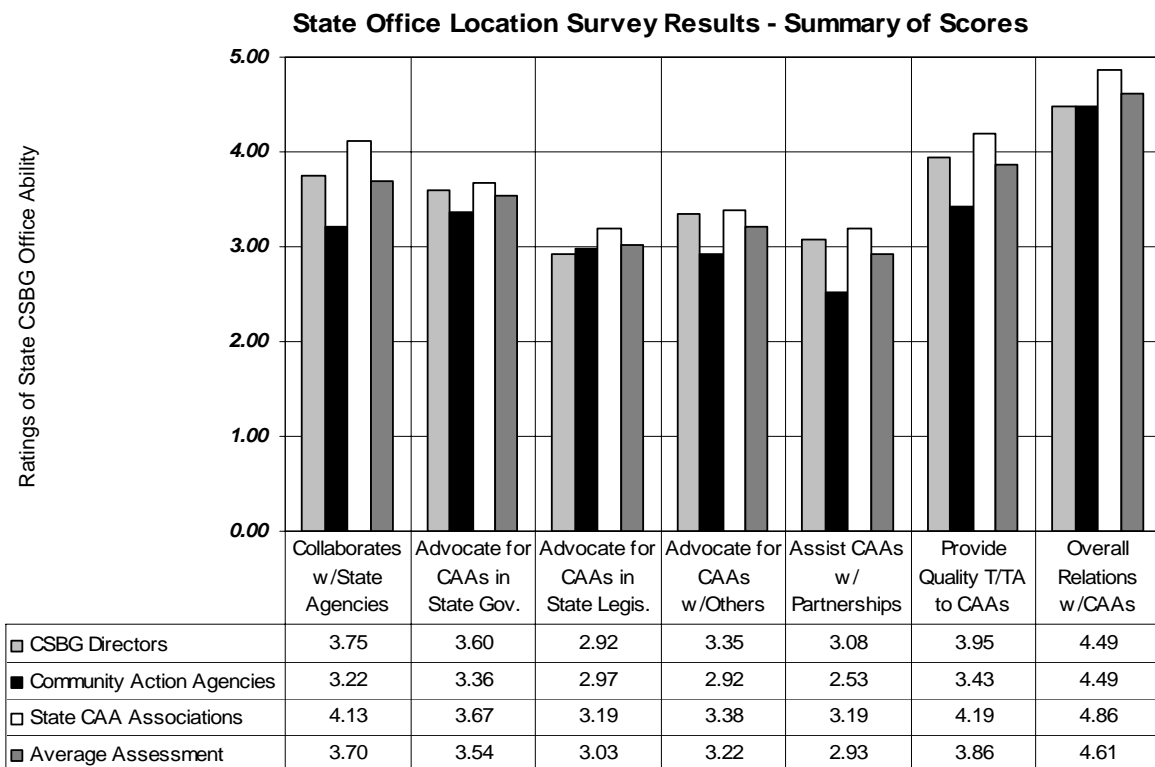
CAA State Association Respondent

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In averaging rating scores across all three network groups, state offices scored highest in overall relationship with CAAs and in providing quality T&TA to local CAAs. State offices on average were rated lower in assisting CAAs to develop private partnerships and in advocating for CAAs in the state legislature than in other key areas.

The apparent strength of the relationships between CAAs and the state offices, coupled with state offices' high ratings for providing quality T&TA, would suggest that the state offices could provide a strong base from which quality improvement efforts could be developed and/or promulgated.

The chart below summarizes the responses of CSBG directors, CAAs, and state CAA Associations:



State Office Ratings by Location of CSBG Office

One of the reasons for initiating this survey was to determine whether or not the location of state CSBG offices within state government affected the ability of the state CSBG office to carry out the responsibilities of a CSBG “lead agency.”

A second look at the data organizes survey responses according to the location of the state CSBG office itself (i.e.: with Community Economic Development programs, with Human Services programs, in the governor’s office, with other state programs).

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“There is no clear cut answer. There are pros and cons to all locations, including our current one.”

State CSBG Director Respondent

Although the rating of offices that are housed within the governor’s office rank consistently lower than offices located elsewhere, the small number of such offices (only two CSBG offices are located in the state’s executive offices) would make any firm conclusions difficult to determine from such a limited sample.

“The placement of the office is less important than the support of the administration.”

State CSBG Director Respondent

The ratings do indicate, however, that those offices housed with Community Economic Development (CED) programs rank consistently higher than those offices located with Human Services programs. Offices located in other departments also ranked higher than the Human Services-based CSBG offices.

Offices located with Community Economic Development programs ranked higher in their ability to advocate for CAAs in the state legislature than did other locations. CED-based offices were also rated as best able to advocate for CAAs with other state agencies, best able to advocate for CAAs with the state legislature and rated highest for their overall relationship with CAAs.

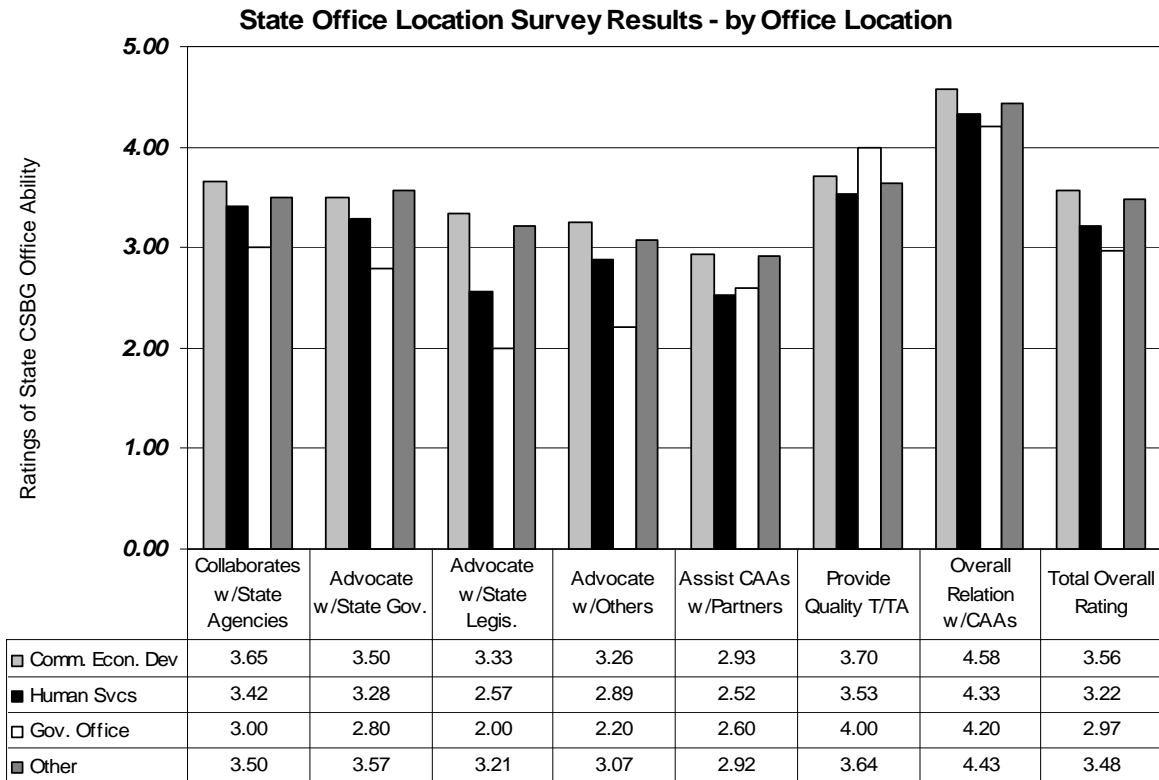
Perhaps because of the inherent tension between the executive and legislative branches of state government, state offices housed within the governor’s office were rated low for their ability to advocate for CAAs in the state legislature. On the other hand, governor’s office-based CSBG offices were rated highest among all locations for their ability to provide quality T&TA to local CAAs.

Offices located in other parts of state government were rated highest for their ability to advocate for CAAs with other agencies of state government. The “other” locations seem to provide a strong foundation for providing T&TA and developing good relations with CAAs as well.

Offices located in the human services division of state government were rated as having “strong” relationships with CAAs. Human services-related offices achieved their lowest ratings for their ability to assist CAAs with private partnerships.

The chart below summarizes survey results according to the location of the state CSBG office:

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Even though a limited number of offices located within the governor’s office precludes drawing any firm determinations from the data, executive-based offices generally average higher in providing quality training and technical assistance to CAAs. In spite of the fact that state offices in other locations tend to be ranked slightly higher in most categories, of the respondents who indicated a preference for moving the state CSBG office, several suggested that the governor’s office would be the best alternative location.

“When OEO was first passed, our offices were in the governor’s office and called State Office of Economic Opportunity that’s when we had most access to governors and legislators– it should be restored”

State CSBG Director Respondent

Should the State Office Be Moved from Its Current Location?

Based on responses, the short answer to this survey question is a clear “no.”

The survey also asked several questions regarding the current location of state CSBG offices. Respondents were asked whether or not the current location of the office enhanced its ability to effectively adhere to the federal CSBG statute. Overall, 78.43% of all respondents felt that the state office location was an enhancement.

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“So much of any program's collaborative success and overall effectiveness relates to capacity, knowledge and skill of the administrator and staff and the commitment of the state agency leadership, not in its location within a particular agency.”

State CSBG Director Respondent

The survey also asked respondents whether or not the current location of the state CSBG office impeded its ability to effectively adhere to the federal CSBG statute. Again, respondents were in agreement—over 80% felt that the current location was not an impediment to fulfilling state office statutory responsibilities.

A final question regarding the location of state CSBG offices was whether or not the federal government should have a say in determining the location of state offices. Although nearly 75% of respondents felt that the federal government should not have a say, many respondents provided strongly-worded comments about this issue.

“This is a federal block grant and to dictate location within state government would seem to run contrary to idea of a block grant.”

CAA Respondent

“Absolutely not! We feel that state governors should retain their authority to determine where the CSBG office should be located.”

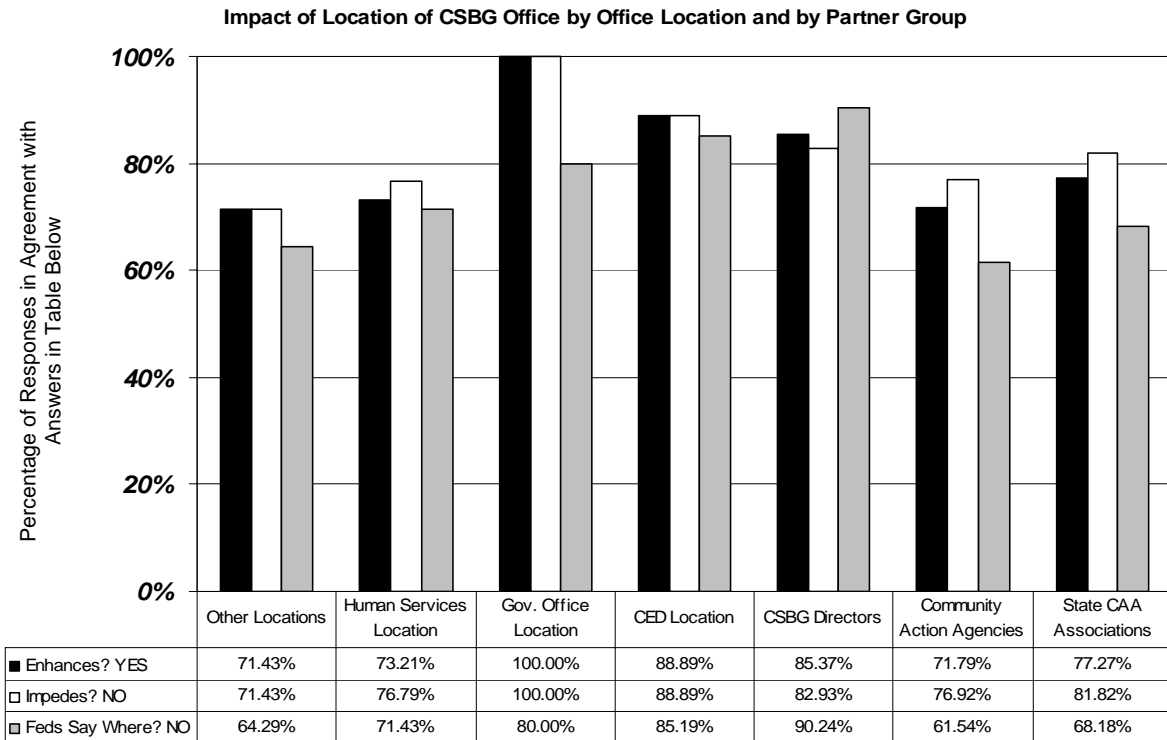
State CSBG Director Respondent

Most who commented felt that the nature of the block grant would be jeopardized by such federal involvement and insisted that the wide variety of state-specific situations would make such federal intervention unworkable.

In comments from all three respondent groups (state CSBG offices, state CAA Associations and CAAs), there were very few advocates for moving the current location of the state office. Such a “leave well enough alone” attitude existed regardless of the current location of the state office.

The chart below summarizes the data regarding the impact of the current location of state CSBG offices, as well as responses to the question regarding a federal role in determining the location of a “lead agency.” The data is presented by the current location of the state CSBG offices as well as by CAA network group.

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Conclusion

As state CSBG offices face the challenges mentioned previously in this report, states may also face new responsibilities for monitoring and oversight of the CSBG. Language included in a Senate version of the proposed reauthorization of the block grant in 2003 required that the state offices more effectively monitor CAAs and provide them with quality T&TA. Although the block grant has not yet been reauthorized, the Senate’s proposed language offers an indication of additional challenges that may be in store for the state offices.

In dealing with these challenges, what does this survey tell us?

- **First of all, there is no ideal location for a state CSBG office.** Nearly all respondents recognized that a location that works in one state may not work in another state, and that the fact that a location is satisfactory today does not mean that a change in state administration or in state office personnel would not make the same location less workable in the future.
- **There is no widespread initiative to move state CSBG offices.** Although individual respondents suggested some alternative locations that might prove advantageous to the CAA network, few urged that immediate action be taken to move the state office.
- **A block grant is a block grant is a block grant.** The strongest comments made in response to survey questions were those made regarding the role of the federal

government in determining the location of state offices. Most respondents were opposed to such a federal role, many were strongly opposed. Any move to increase the federal role in determining the location of state CSBG offices would likely be widely and strongly opposed.

- **CAAs and state offices seem to share a strong, positive relationship.** Many of the comments by CAA staff included praise for state office personnel and indicated a respect for the state offices to function effectively in spite of a lack of resources and/or political constraints. This relationship should be viewed as a strength by the CAA network and should serve as a foundation for future collaborative efforts.
- **State Offices are believed to provide quality T&TA.** Although the survey did not gather specific information about individual training sessions or areas of expertise, state offices received consistently high ratings in this area. Because of this high rating, NASCSP and other partner organizations should further investigate the potential for state offices to provide a platform for quality training and technical assistance.
- **State offices are not seen as being highly effective in assisting CAAs to develop private partnerships.** State CSBG offices and NASCSP should develop strategies to strengthen state offices in this area. By working in conjunction with CAAs and state associations, NASCSP could develop a “toolkit” of best practices for state offices to use in assisting CAAs to develop partnerships. Such a toolkit could be disseminated to state offices through conferences, workshops, CSBG orientation sessions, etc.
- **The relative effectiveness of a state office is highly dependent on the ability of state office staff.** Although this may seem to be an overly obvious conclusion to make, it is important to recognize this important factor. Many respondents commented on the critical role played by skilled and experienced state staff in helping CAAs achieve their goals. NASCSP should continue to invest time, energy and other resources into efforts to orient and train state CSBG staff. Given the challenges ahead, such an investment will likely become even more important in the future.

“I believe the location of the office is less important than the resources made available. Staff capacity has an impact on the ability of the state to make sure that all the federal certifications are met. Things such as advocacy and technical assistance may become a lower priority than more basic functions such as monitoring, getting the funds out and crisis response for troubled CAAs, etc. Standards on where the office is located seem less important than standards on staffing resources.”

State CSBG Director Respondent

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