

# THEORY OF CHANGE FAQ'S

## Q: What is a Theory of Change?

A: A Theory of Change (TOC) is a **conceptual road map** for how an organization expects to achieve its intended impact. While similar to a logic model (which has detailed information about needs, activities, inputs, outputs, outcomes, and indicators), a Theory of Change demonstrates the “big picture” about how all of these components work together. It also includes the core principles of the network, identification of strategies and services, and how the network will convert their organizational and financial resources into the desired results.

## Q: What is the purpose of a national Theory of Change?

A: The [National Community Action Theory of Change](#) was developed as a way to explain what Community Action is as a network. Our Theory of Change:

- **Describes** the elements of a common framework Community Action Agencies (CAAs) use to produce change.
- **Portrays** the broad picture of Community Action: long term goals, core principles, and system capacity.
- **Identifies** the assumptions and core principles that guide the design of services and strategies to reach the long-term goals it hopes to achieve.
- **Demonstrates** commitment to accountability for the entire network through the Performance Management Framework and specifically to agency excellence through the Organizational Standards.
- **Connects** the foundation of a high performing national network to the services and strategies implemented by local CAAs in order to achieve the national Community Action goals.

## Q: How did the Community Action Theory of Change come about?

A: In 2011, Community Action leaders began to gather feedback, through surveys, listening sessions and webinars, on the core principles of the Community Services Block Grant Program (CSBG). The network stated that it was critical for this theory of change to reflect elements of the current CSBG Act, incorporate CAA history, vision and values; as well as include fresh and innovative thinking about the future of our work. The resulting document articulates core principles for the Network, identifies CAA Network national goals, demonstrates the CAA Network’s unique approach to addressing poverty, and makes a complicated system easier to understand.

## Q: How can a local Community Action Agency use the national Theory of Change?

A: Local CAAs can use the Theory of Change to communicate the impact of the national network to local leaders and elected officials, funders, and the general public. The Theory of Change can also be used when talking internally to staff and Board members. The national TOC is the framework for the network, and it can be used to help each CAA consider its own TOC that will be a guide through the implementation of the Performance Management Framework.

## Q: What is the Community Action network?

A: The network includes over 1,000 high performing Community Action Agencies, State Associations, State Offices, and Federal Partners supported by the Community Services Block Grant to mobilize communities to fight poverty across the country covering all 50 states, D.C. and 5 US territories.



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## **Q: Why do we include Community Action's core principles?**

**A:** The core principles are included in our Theory of Change so that everyone understands how our work remains consistent with our ultimate purpose: using our capacity at local, state and national levels to respond to poverty issues. The core principles ground our framework on the assumptions and beliefs we have when it comes to fighting poverty. They highlight our flexibility and the ability to find local solutions to local needs.

## **Q: What assurance is there that CSBG funds are spent to meet the intent of the law?**

**A:** Accountability is built into all levels of the network. Our Performance Management Framework provides a set of [organizational standards](#) for local agencies to assure they have the capacity to produce results in their communities. A set of [State and Federal Accountability measures](#) are included to ensure CSBG funds are spent efficiently and effectively. This framework holds all levels of the network accountable for achieving outcomes that equip people to exit poverty.

## **Q: What kinds of services do the Community Action Agencies provide?**

**A:** Per the CSBG Act, and Organizational Standards, CAAs are required to conduct a local Community Needs Assessment process every 3 years. CAAs decide which services they provide based upon their unique needs assessment. This could include services such as employment and educational services, asset building strategies, health and social behavioral development, housing opportunities, and civic engagement for low income members of communities.

## **Q: What are the major goals that all local Community Action Agencies work towards?**

**A:** Our national network has three main goals that we strive to meet locally. They are:

1. Individuals and families with low incomes are stable and achieve economic security.
2. Communities where people with low incomes live are healthy and offer economic opportunity.
3. People with low incomes are engaged and active in building opportunities in communities.

## **Q: Are the Community Action Agencies funded only by CSBG?**

**A:** No, while CSBG dollars certainly support these agencies, other funding includes federal, state, local, and private resources. The CSBG funds provide leveraging abilities for CAAs to raise additional resources. In fact, for every \$1 of CSBG, CAAs leveraged \$7.70 from state, local, and private sources<sup>1</sup>, (this includes the value of volunteer hours at federal minimum wage). When all federal sources and volunteer hours are included, the CSBG Network leveraged \$20.19 of non-CSBG dollars per \$1 of CSBG.

## **Q: How do we know if the Community Action Agencies achieved the intended results?**

**A:** The [CSBG Annual Report](#) provides a comprehensive picture on the outcomes CAAs obtain. It also includes demographic data that shows how this network serves the needs of families with low incomes and profiles of community initiatives.

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<sup>1</sup> "FFY 2016 CSBG Highlights." CSBG - CSBG Publications - NASCSP. Accessed April 17, 2018.  
<http://www.nascsp.org/CSBG/597/CSBG-National-Report-and-State-Fact-Sheets.aspx?iHt=23>.

