

## Governors and Taking the Lead on Addressing Poverty with the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG)

### Introduction

As newly elected governors flesh out their human services policy priorities, many are looking at highly flexible block grants. The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) is a model example of a successful Federal-State-Local partnership. The high level of flexibility in CSBG allows programs and services to be aligned with a wide range of gubernatorial priorities. CSBG empowers states and local communities to take the lead on tackling poverty through innovative, flexible, and locally tailored solutions. The program can be traced back to the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, and was converted to a block grant in the CSBG Act of 1981. Three aspects of CSBG give it the potential to serve as a valuable tool for achieving governors' policy goals surrounding poverty, economic opportunity, and self-sufficiency:

- ✓ The **structure** of CSBG empowers governors, state agencies, and local communities to partner together on identifying and implementing innovative locally-tailored approaches to poverty alleviation.
- ✓ The robust local, state, and federal **accountability measures** of the CSBG Performance Management Framework are unique, compared to other federal programs.
- ✓ CSBG creates **impact** in communities across the country by leveraging additional private, local, state, and federal investments to address poverty through program and system alignment.

### Structure

CSBG is a block grant administered and managed by states, which distribute funds to a nationwide CSBG network of over 1,000 local CSBG Eligible Entities, also known as Community Action Agencies (CAAs). The CSBG network serves 99% of U.S. counties.

In most states, CSBG can be found in the state Department of Health & Human Services, Department of Social Services, Department of Community & Economic Development, or the Department of Children & Families. The CSBG state office oversees a statewide network of Community Action Agencies that provide an infrastructure of community partners with the capacity and local knowledge to effectively deliver innovative programs and achieve gubernatorial policy goals to address the causes and conditions of poverty.

Community Action Agencies use CSBG funds to address a wide range of needs, which may include services and programs that address one or more of the core domains in which they work: employment, education and cognitive development, income, infrastructure and asset building,

housing, health and social behavioral development, and civic engagement and community involvement.

The CSBG Act of 1981 also requires that the work of Community Action Agencies must be shaped by a community needs assessment performed every three years. This process ensures that CAA programs and services are targeted and relevant to unique community needs, rather than a one-size-fits-all solution. The needs assessment prevents duplication of services and incorporates community feedback in the CAAs strategic planning process. Furthermore, the CSBG Act requires one-third of a Community Action Agency's board of directors to be composed of people who are low-income or their representatives, ensuring that local needs are accurately reflected.

CAAs are anchors in the local community, with strong community ties and a rich history of working with community members. The over 1,000 CAAs serve as a delivery network for more than just CSBG. CSBG is the uniting funding source that brings many different federal, state, and local human services programs under one roof. The unique and trusted role of a CAA in the community makes it the ideal access point for other federal, state, and local programs such as Head Start, energy assistance, workforce programs, and weatherization assistance. CSBG coordinates funding across federal departments and breaks down existing silos to support teams of dedicated human services professionals that administer this wide array of programs. CSBG helps people access the federal, State and local safety net, acting as the bridge that helps people maintain stability and work towards economic security.

## Accountability

In addition to a structure that empowers governors to partner with local communities, CSBG is bolstered by a Performance Management Framework to ensure accountability at all levels of the network. This federally established Performance Management Framework includes state and federal accountability measures, organizational standards for Community Action Agencies, and a Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) system:

- **State and Federal Accountability** measures ensure that funds are distributed in a timely manner and that monitoring activities are completed in accordance with the CSBG Act.
- **Organizational Standards** ensure that CAAs are meeting a set of requirements in implementing maximum feasible participation, the vision and direction of the agency, and operations and accountability.
- **Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA)** is a system that empowers CAAs to assess the needs and conditions of poverty in each community and identify continuous improvement in program implementation.



Under the Performance Management Framework, the CSBG Network reports outcomes through the CSBG Annual Report. The CSBG Annual Report was designed to complement ROMA and supports the overall CSBG Performance Management Framework.

Within this reporting mechanism, National Performance Indicators are used across the network to track and manage progress, ensuring CAAs have the data they need to improve and innovate. The ROMA system allows local communities to strengthen their impact and achieve robust results through continuous learning, improvement, and innovation. Furthermore, CSBG State Offices monitor local agency performance and adherence to organizational standards, providing training and technical assistance to ensure high quality delivery of programs and services.

## Impact

CSBG produces tangible results at the local level. Federal CSBG dollars are used to support and strengthen the anti-poverty infrastructure of local communities. In Fiscal Year 2016, for every \$1 of CSBG spent, CAAs leveraged \$7.70 from state, local, and private sources, including the value of volunteer hours at federal minimum wage. This leveraging of funds allowed CAAs to expand and maintain highly successful programs.

Including all federal sources and volunteer hours, the CSBG Network leveraged \$20.19 of non-CSBG dollars per \$1 of CSBG. CAAs leverage a wide variety of funding from programs and agencies such as WIOA, HUD, CDBG, FEMA, WIC, DOL, USDA, and the Older Americans Act to name only a select few. This allows CAAs to provide wraparound services across multiple core service domains, helping families move off assistance and towards economic security. This ability to leverage allows CAAs to implement innovative practices such as two-generation approaches, collective impact, and bundled services. Without CSBG, many communities across the United States would struggle to implement critical programs that address poverty at both the community and family levels.

Leveraging multiple types of funding through CSBG allows CAAs to expand their impact in local communities:

- ✓ **5.8 million low-income people** received supports which reduced or eliminated barriers to employment, acquired a job, obtained an increase in employment income, or achieved “living wage” employment and benefits.
- ✓ **3.1 million** community resources or opportunities (e.g. transportation programs, youth programs, health care services, affordable housing, and child care programs) were improved or expanded for low-income people.



- ✓ **9.9 million** low-income individuals and families received emergency assistance such as disaster relief, emergency clothing, temporary shelter, or protection from violence.
- ✓ **3.2 million** low-income people received services and secured or maintained an independent living situation.

The CSBG Network is delivering innovative, comprehensive, and effective programs across the country that put individuals and families on a path out of poverty. Through CSBG, governors are able to leverage unique expertise and a trusted delivery network to implement cutting edge poverty fighting strategies such as two-generation approaches, collective impact, bundled services, and more.

### **Two-Generation Approach in Oklahoma:**

CAP Tulsa employs a two-generation, whole-family strategy in its programs, connecting adult and child services for larger, longer-term impacts on family economic success than could be achieved by focusing on either children or parents in isolation. Young children receive high quality educational opportunities such as HeadStart, and parents enroll in evidence-based programs such as CareerAdvance occupational training, financial coaching, literacy instruction, and parenting classes. CSBG funds have been a vital source of support to provide staff that is able to research, plan, develop, and implement innovative client programs. CSBG funds are instrumental in administering the daily operations of CAP Tulsa, which employs 550 members of the local community.

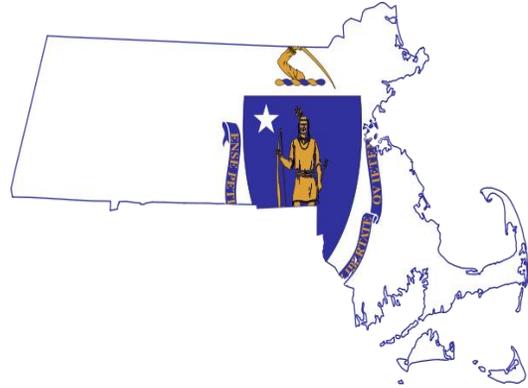


### **Collective Impact in Florida:**

Pinellas Opportunity Council, Incorporated is the Community Action Agency serving St. Petersburg, Florida. Pinellas Opportunity Council Inc is a founding member of the 2020 Plan Task Force, which is a Collective Impact group started in 2015 whose goal is to reduce poverty in St. Petersburg by 30% by the year 2020. The 2020 Plan formula for accelerating poverty reduction is threefold: increasing incomes, targeting parents, and strengthening families. Because poverty is defined by income, 2020's major focus is to increase incomes through full-time, part-time and self-employment. The 2020 initiative targets employment primarily to parents-in-poverty because for every parent who exits poverty, an average 1.4 children do as well. The goal is for 70% of parents served (2,450) to remain on track by the 2020 Census. In addition to job training, placement and retention support, 2020 also uses wrap-around family services to help parents become active in their children's success.



**Bundled Services in Massachusetts:** Generations Advancing Together Through Education (GATE) at Action for Community Development (ABCD) in Boston engages ABCD's Child Care Choices program in partnership with three local training providers to bundle and streamline access to child care and job training services. Participants select a training program from either financial services, healthcare, or computer technology and work with ABCD staff to identify and select child care options. ABCD helps participants navigate the job search and placement process and provides wraparound case management services to connect families with resources that might be needed (e.g., fuel assistance, housing, food pantry). In 2017, 60% of GATE participants obtained a job with an hourly wage that ranged from \$12.25 to \$40.63.



## Conclusion

Community Action Agencies are an incredible opportunity for governors to develop, test, and implement new pilot programs, promising practices, and further reduce poverty. The structure of CSBG provides governors the unique opportunity to partner with trusted community organizations and take the lead on reducing poverty. Through CSBG, governors can establish and sustain an infrastructure of trusted, experienced poverty alleviation agencies that can implement and achieve gubernatorial policy priorities.

The CSBG network is subject to the extensive accountability mechanisms of the CSBG Performance Management Framework, ensuring that the Federal Office, State Offices, and local Community Action Agencies are effective and responsible stewards of federal funds. Finally, CSBG is producing concrete results, serving millions of vulnerable Americans each year who need support in becoming economically mobile. From bundled services, to two-generation approaches, to collective impact – the CSBG network is at the forefront of innovation in the fight against poverty.

---

### Authors:

- **Eric Behna**, Program Policy & Communications Manager, National Association for State Community Services Programs (NASCS). NASCS represents the state administrators of the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) and Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) in all 50 states, DC, and five U.S. Territories. For more information visit [www.nascsp.org](http://www.nascsp.org)
- **Kimberley Meinert**, senior policy analyst for human services, Economic Opportunity Division, NGA Center for Best Practices, National Governors Association