

States Taking the Lead on Addressing Poverty with the Community Services Block Grant

Introduction

As state governments are considering how to implement their human services policy priorities, many are looking to their highly flexible block grants. The high level of flexibility in CSBG allows programs and services to be aligned with a wide range of policy 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 state policy goals surrounding poverty, economic opportunity, and public welfare:

- ✓ The **structure** of CSBG empowers legislatures, state agencies, and local communities to partner together on identifying and implementing innovative locally tailored approaches to alleviate poverty.
- ✓ The robust local, state, and federal **accountability measures** of the CSBG Performance Management Framework provide a unique assurance of performance and efficiency at all levels of the network.
- ✓ 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

The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) is a model example of a successful Federal-State-Local partnership. CSBG is a block grant administered and managed by states, which distribute funds to a nationwide 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, along with community partners, have the capacity and local knowledge to effectively deliver innovative programs and achieve state policy goals.

The CSBG Act requires that the work of Community Action Agencies 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 service duplication 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.

Community Action Agencies use CSBG funds to address a wide range of locally identified 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.

CAA’s are anchors in the local community, with strong community ties and a rich history of working with community members. The more than 1,000 CAAs serve as a delivery network for more than just CSBG. CSBG is the uniting funding source that brings together many different federal, state, and local human services programs such as Head Start, energy assistance, and weatherization assistance. CSBG helps people access the federal, state, and local safety net, acting as the bridge that helps people maintain stability and work towards economic wellbeing.



Accountability

In addition to a structure that empowers states 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 CAAs, and a Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) system:

- **State and Federal Accountability** measures ensure that key components of CSBG administration operate efficiently, including timely distribution of funds, use of customer feedback for improvement, monitoring and oversight of eligible entities and states, data analysis and reporting, and creating linkages and partnerships to assure the effective delivery of services.
- **Organizational Standards** ensure that CAAs are meeting requirements in implementing maximum feasible participation of the people and communities served in the operations of the agency, the vision and direction of the agency, and operations and accountability.
- **Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA)** is a system that empowers CAAs and states to address identified needs through data analysis and evaluation and implement 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 actualize 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.

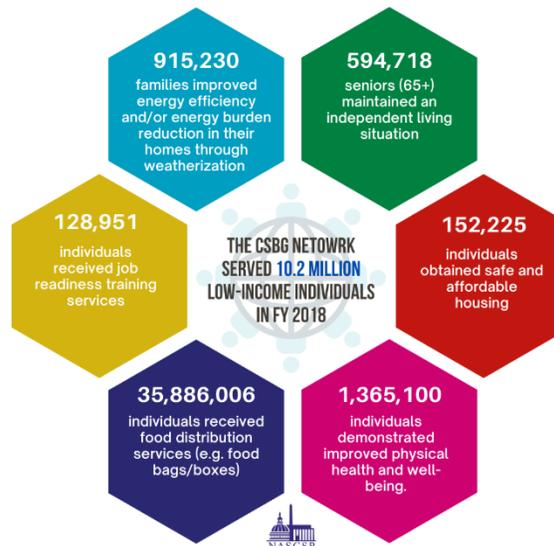
Impact

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 2018, for every \$1 of CSBG spent, CAAs leveraged \$8.26 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, state, local and private funding sources and volunteer hours, the CSBG Network leveraged \$21.97 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 few of the federal sources of funding. This ability to leverage allows CAAs to use innovative strategies such as two-generation approaches 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:

- Over 10.2 million individuals were served by local CSBG-eligible entities.
- CSBG-eligible entities provided services to over 930,000 families headed by single mothers.
- 915,230 families improved energy efficiency and/or energy burden reduction in their homes through weatherization
- 594,718 seniors (65+) maintained an independent living situation



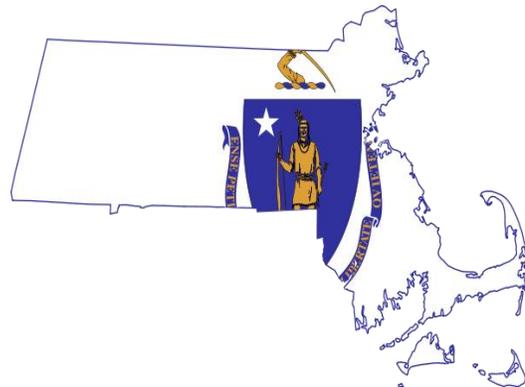
- 360,474 low-income people received services through VITA, EITC, or Other Tax Preparation programs
- 152,225 individuals obtained safe and affordable housing.
- 55,684 unemployed adults who obtained employment (up to a living wage)
- 18,090 unemployed adults who obtained employment (with a living wage or higher)
- 12,090 individuals obtained a high school diploma and/or obtained an equivalency certificate or diploma

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 wellbeing than could be achieved by focusing on either children or parents in isolation. Young children receive high quality educational opportunities such as Head Start, and parents enroll in evidence-based programs such as Career Advance 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.



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 childcare 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

The structure of CSBG allows states the flexibility to partner with communities and take the lead on alleviating the causes and conditions of poverty. Through CSBG, states can establish and

sustain an infrastructure of trusted, experienced poverty alleviation agencies that can implement and achieve 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, the CSBG network is at the forefront of innovation in the fight to end poverty.