![NASCSP - National Association for State Community Services Programs]

State Management Work Group

Promising Practices Compendium

September 2023

This work would not have been possible without the dedication of the State Management Work Group members, who so generously gave NASCSP three years of their valuable time. We are beyond grateful for your contributions.

Member	State	Region
Jaimi Clifford	Maine	I
Manny Rosa	New York	II
Abby Hanks	Virginia	III
Nancy Rowland/Kris Wilson	Kentucky	IV
Anna Sainsbury	Wisconsin	V
Karen Keith	Texas	VI
Johna Trapani	Missouri	VII
Alex Diaz	Colorado	VIII
Leslie Taylor	California	IX
Leeann Marx	Oregon	X
Beverly Buchanan	Arkansas	NASCSP Board President

To the many CSBG State Directors who responded to NASCSP surveys and participated in interviews and focus groups, thank you.

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Introduction

Beginning in 2021 and finalizing its work in 2023, the State Management Work Group (SMWG) served as a consultative body to NASCSP and OCS *in conducting research that informs the development of a variety of practices, tools, resources, and training and technical assistance offerings for state administrators.* The SMWG members provided direction and consultation to identify the state management practices that are essential to the successful administration of CSBG, and the development of tools, resources, and technical assistance that address these key areas.

The SMWG members were comprised of eleven dynamic State Administrators representing every RPIC region: large and small states, experienced and new directors, etc. These members helped identify the prioritized practices by analyzing the 2021 **American Customer Satisfaction Survey** (ACSI), conducting extensive research using ACSI data to identify promising practices among high-scoring states, and developing tools, training and technical assistance (TTA) to help others with implementation of these promising practices at a State Office.

Background

SMWG members had several deliverables over the course of its three-year commitment. Below is an outline of the SMWG efforts.

Needs Assessment (2021): Using the ACSI Eligible Entity 2021 Survey Results (data and the verbatim comments), the SMWG identified five management areas on which to focus its efforts. The local agencies in the survey helped define what the issues were and what was most important. The five prioritized practices, identified through the needs assessment, are below.

- ✓ Relationship Management: Engaging the Network
- ✓ Policy Development: Development and Dissemination of Clear Policies
- ✓ Planning: State Plan
- ✓ Training and Technical Assistance: CNA, CAP Plans, Strategic Plans, ROMA, & Targeting
- ✓ Monitoring and Oversight: Monitoring Tools

Compendium of Promising Peer Practices (2022): The SMWG members, led by NASCSP, identified promising practices for the five management areas (research included surveys, interviews, and focus groups) of high-scoring states. Tools, templates, TTA, etc. being used by these states were also identified and collected.

Gap Assessment (2023): In early 2023, SMWG members identified the tools, templates, TTA, etc. tied to "high impact" promising practices to review and evaluate in the next phase with the goal of updating/modifying these, as necessary. Workgroup members also identified what was missing and what to develop to better support the implementation of the identified promising practices.

Tool and TTA Development (2023): The SMWG members developed a variety of tools to further support implementation of the promising practices. Altogether, over 20 products (tools, resources, and trainings) along with all the information contained in the Compendium/

Data Map were gathered or developed to offer a very helpful, easy-to-use "toolbox" for the states to utilize. Additionally, the SMWG thought including the work of the ACSI Promising Practices Work Group (PPWG) on developing linkages at the state level in the compendium would be beneficial to State Administrators.

Purpose

The purpose of this compendium is to help State Administrators improve the quality, consistency, and efficiency of the CSBG State Office. We expect that use of the promising practices and accompanying tools, resources, and training will result in better service delivery to the CAAs and increased satisfaction with the State Office, leading to improved ACSI scores for the states.

The compendium is designed to help State Administrators understand key components of each promising practice including the high scoring states, how to implement at their State Office, challenges, and benefits. The tools, templates, TTA, etc. developed by the SMWG are meant to be easy to use, generic enough to be adapted by any state, and useful in the implementation of the associated promising practice.

Promising Practices

Relationship Management: Engaging the Network

Definition of "Engaging the Network"

Any connection, communication, or collaboration opportunity that enables the State Office to work with the Network and State Association to achieve CSBG goals.

Promising Practices

1. *Maintain a Strong, Collaborative Relationship with the State Association* – Develop and maintain a *strong, collaborative relationship with the State Association* that helps reduce the workload on State Administrators and builds a trusting relationship with eligible entities

2. *Minimum Administration, Maximum Engagement* – Engage eligible entities in multiple ways (one-on-one, focus groups, workgroups/task forces), in conjunction with the State Association. **Intentionally** build a trusting relationship, requiring clear, constant, and consistent communication

3. *Establish an Economic Opportunity Council (EOC) or similar group* – A statewide organization of Community Action representatives which holds regular meetings to share vital information, answer questions, and offer peer-to-peer support

4. *Leverage Technology to better engage the Network* – The use of technology to help State Administrators share clear, constant, and consistent communication, as well as track Network-wide questions and feedback

5. *Dedicate Staff to Engaging the Network Efforts* – A State Office position and/or included in the State CSBG Administrator's job description that clearly outlines, the role, responsibilities, and expectations at the State level regarding engaging the Network

1. ***Maintain a Strong, Collaborative Relationship with the State Association*** – Develop and maintain a *strong, collaborative relationship with the State Association* that helps reduce the workload on State Administrators and builds a trusting relationship with eligible entities

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Arkansas, California, Colorado, Maryland, New York, Wisconsin, Utah

Purpose:

The State Association's role is to support eligible entities within their Network; they often do this by also supporting the State CSBG office in areas of training, technical assistance, annual reporting, etc. The State Association can act as a bridge for the State CSBG office to develop meaningful relationships with eligible entities. Developing and maintaining a strong, collaborative relationship with the State Association can help States improve the overall administration of CSBG funding,

Method:

Developing a contract with a work plan, expected deliverables, and offering annual funding is one avenue to develop a strong, collaborative relationship with the State Association. States can use the T/TA needs survey to develop a work plan and expected deliverables. Regular meetings, either monthly or quarterly, with the State Association and/or the Network help to build meaningful relationships. States can utilize their State Association to assist with the facilitation of peer-to-peer workgroups/taskforces (i.e., ROMA, State Plan, Board Development, Community Needs Assessment, Self-Sufficiency Workgroups, Monitoring, Formula Revision, etc.), which can help to increase State Office capacity.

Challenges:

Developing and maintaining a strong, collaborative relationship takes time and effort. States need an intentional mindset to develop the relationship and seek input at all touchpoints. Historically poor relationships between the State Association and/or Network can affect a State Administrator's ability to develop a healthy relationship. Working to understand the Network history, creating opportunities to collaborate, and keeping a focus on the ultimate goal of CSBG can be helpful.

Benefits:

For the agencies, these relationships help to support needs and fill gaps by focusing both the State and State Associations' resources to alleviate poverty for the clients served. It also increases support for eligible entities' needs and a unified message between the State and State Association. Additionally, these relationships provide a crucial link that helps to maintain critical historical knowledge throughout the Network, which is especially valuable in times of high turnover at both the State and local level. States also have a partner in achieving objectives. These relationships help to streamline processes and reduce the workload for State Administrators and the Network alike.

Tools/Templates/Resources

- [See the State Management Work Group Page](#)

2. *Minimum Administration, Maximum Engagement* – Engage eligible entities in multiple ways: one-on-one, focus groups, workgroups/task forces, and in conjunction with the State Association. **Intentionally** build a trusting relationship, requiring clear, constant, and consistent communication.

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Arkansas, California, Colorado, New York, Texas, Utah

Purpose:

Intentionally incorporating touchpoints such as one-on-one meetings, focus groups, and/or workgroups/task forces, with eligible entities, allows the State the opportunity to build trusting relationships and share clear, constant, and consistent communication. Including the State Association helps to reduce the workload of the State Administrator.

Method:

Through a variety of strategies, this practice can be implemented using one or more of the following touchpoints such as ad hoc one-on-one "touch-base" calls with agencies, focus groups, and/or workgroups/task forces. Before implementing ad hoc one-on-one "touch-base" calls, it is important that States communicate with the Network their intention of holding random one-on-one calls. This helps to remove eligible entity hesitation in opening communication with the State Office. States may want to identify topics before one-on-one calls (i.e., successes, challenges, questions, T/TA needs, etc.) to encourage a healthy conversation with eligible entities. Focus groups and/or workgroups/task forces can be done in conjunction with the State Association and can focus on ROMA, State Plan, Board Development, or any other topics the State would like to gather more insight on from the Network.

Challenges:

Finding the time to hold these touchpoints and not staying consistent with communicating regularly with the eligible entities is one major challenge. States who created a reoccurring calendar invite for one-on-one "touch base" calls were more consistent with their engagement efforts. Working with the State Association regarding the facilitation of focus groups and/or workgroups/task forces also helps States accomplish these engagement goals.

Benefits:

Holding these types of touchpoints with eligible entities helps to build and strengthen relationships between the CSBG State Lead Office and the agencies. These touchpoints can assist with problem-solving, mitigate compliance deficiencies, share best practices, and improve connectivity to other eligible entities for peer-to-peer opportunities. It improves consensus surrounding the implementation of policies by seeking input from eligible entities prior to policies being changed. It benefits both the State and eligible entities with the development of innovative delivery strategies and flushing through ideas and solutions to needs identified within communities.

Tools/Templates/Resources

- [See the State Management Work Group Page](#)

3. ***Establish an Economic Opportunity Council (EOC) or similar group*** – A statewide organization of Community Action representatives which holds regular meetings to share vital information, answer questions, and offer peer-to-peer support

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Maine

Purpose:

Developing an EOC or similar advisory council provides the State with the opportunity to share clear, constant, and consistent communication. It provides another touchpoint allowing the State, State Association, and eligible entities to intentionally build a trusting relationship.

Method:

The EOC or similar advisory council is a group with at least one member from every eligible entity within the state's Network, usually represented by the Chief Operating Officer and/or program manager. The council holds regular meetings, typically monthly, to work as a collaborative on CSBG issues, policy, and best practices. The State Association and members facilitate the meeting and develop meeting agenda items with little to no input from the State. Membership and attendance are built into the State and eligible entity contract. Advisory bylaws are in place, identifying key roles of the council.

Challenges:

Until mandatory attendance was included in the CSBG contracts, attendance was a problem. It is also important that agencies ensure that the correct staff is present as issues, questions, and news are shared at each meeting. Agencies that fail to attend the meetings will be at a disadvantage and will need to catch up.

Benefits:

The EOC or similar advisory council enhances collaboration and relationship development between the State, State Association, and eligible entities. States are able to share up-to-date information and guidance to the Network in a clear, constant, and consistent way. Regular meetings create the opportunity for the State and/or State Association to offer training and technical assistance. In some cases, EOC can advocate for policy changes and direction. The EOC also enhances State and community linkages, which help raise awareness of additional resources that can be utilized to better serve customers.

Tools/Templates/Resources
- [See the State Management Work Group Page](#)

4. *Leverage Technology to better engage the Network* – The use of technology to help State Administrators share clear, constant, and consistent communication, as well as track Network-wide questions and feedback

States Who Have Employed This Practice:
Texas, West Virginia

Purpose:
Utilizing technology can create another touchpoint opportunity for States to engage with agencies in a manner that is clear, constant, and consistent. It allows States to gather data and historical knowledge to be saved and shared with the Network.

Method:
Identify and purchase software platform, such as Wufoo, Formstack, Google Forms, etc. following any State procurement policy. Develop Q/A form via software and share the link with Network. A hyperlink on the department website should also be available for the Network to request guidance or ask a programmatic question. Notification emails are sent to all CSBG State Office staff indicating a new submission. The lead CSBG State staff will respond within 24 to 48 hours. If the lead CSBG State staff person is out of the office, other program staff may respond to any inquiries. Responses are saved with the original question for historical information and to ensure responses are clear and consistent. Certain features will vary among software platforms.

Challenges:
Most software platforms have an annual cost ranging from approximately $170 to $2,200. CSBG State Administrative or Discretionary funding can be used to purchase such software. Certain features will vary among software platforms and have varying storage capabilities. It is important that States identify their needs and research all possible avenues before purchasing any software platforms. States may receive some pushback from eligible entities on the new process. Including agencies in the development and/or implementation of the new platform may help reduce resistance. Offering training may help the Network adapt to the new process.

Benefits:
The Network has easy access to the State CSBG Office and will receive a timely response in writing. Historical information on repetitive questions and responses allows States to respond in a clear, constant, and consistent way. States are able to pull data and identify areas of concern and develop T/TA and update program FAQs.

Tools/Templates/Resources:
- [See the State Management Work Group Page](#)

5. ***Dedicate Staff to Engaging the Network Efforts*** – A State Office position and/or included in the State CSBG Administrator's job description that clearly outlines, the role, responsibilities, and expectations at the State level regarding engaging the Network

States Who Have Employed This Practice:
Georgia, Illinois

Purpose:
Having a specific position and/or roles and responsibilities within a job description clearly establishes the State's intention to make engagement a crucial part of CSBG administration and allows State Administrators the time needed to do so. It helps to clearly identify the State's overall goal and the priority it places on this critical function for the entire Network.

Method:
If needed, identify funding to support the development and/or incorporation of engaging the Network into a job description. Identify state goals, roles, and responsibilities. Work with the State department and Human Resources to develop and/or update job descriptions based on engagement goals and needs.

Challenges:
Funding to support the development of a job position and/or updating a current job position may limit a state's ability to incorporate engagement in a job description. Not having a strong working relationship with the State's Human Resources department and/or other stakeholders can affect the development and speed of a job description being developed and/or updated. Bureaucracy within the State Administration may also create challenges. Communicating the benefits of incorporating engagement in a job description to all stakeholders may help alleviate resistance.

Benefits:
Dedicated staff/staff time to provide support to eligible entities, in turn, supports clients and agencies by helping to fill gaps. It helps to develop a consistent touchpoint of engagement for the Network. Additionally, it clearly identifies the expectations of the State's role and helps prioritize this activity.

Tools/Templates/Resources
- [See the State Management Work Group Page](#)

Monitoring and Oversight: Monitoring Tools

What is the purpose of monitoring eligible entities?
According to section 678B of the CSBG Act, States monitor "to determine whether eligible entities meet the performance goals, administrative standards, financial management requirements, and other requirements of a State." However, if done right, monitoring plays a critical role that helps build effective and efficient eligible entities, in turn moving the needle against the war on poverty.

Promising Practices:

1. *[Monitor for Impact](#)* – Building trusting, transparent, collaborative relationships and providing feedback that will support and help improve service delivery of eligible entities

2. *[Preparation is Key](#)* – The State takes the needed steps to prepare itself and eligible entities in advance of monitoring

3. *[Consistency is Critical](#)* – Establishing processes, procedures, and trainings at the State level that help to ensure that monitoring of *all* eligible entities is completed in a uniform manner

4. *[Post-Monitoring Efforts are Integral to the Process](#)* – States track individual eligible entities' corrective action plans for progress, identify and share trends, issues, and promising practices seen in the monitoring with the Network and take action to address the identified trends and issues

1. *Monitor for Impact* – Building trusting, transparent, collaborative partnerships and providing feedback that will support and help improve service delivery of eligible entities

States Who Have Employed This Practice:
Arizona, Colorado, Maine, Montana, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Utah, Virginia, Wisconsin

Purpose:
Monitoring is a vital role that State Administrators perform to ensure eligible entity compliance with CSBG Federal and State requirements. ACSI top-scoring States indicated they use monitoring to not only meet requirements but also as an opportunity to monitor for impact and improve the delivery of services to the customers CSBG serves, by providing States the chance to build relationships, offer T/TA, and share promising practices.

Method:
The State must first determine its ultimate goal of monitoring and what it's hoping to accomplish and create a culture that reinforces this ideology. It is critical that States create the time and space to build trusting, transparent, collaborative partnerships with eligible entities, always choosing to maintain a two-way relationship and making it a team effort. States should use monitoring as an opportunity to determine T/TA needs as well as identify and share promising practices that will add value, improve service delivery, and build eligible entity capacity. Ideally, States should use monitoring as a way to improve relationships and offer coaching to eligible entities, while creating more face-to-face time and gathering feedback. This can be done by conducting a desk review prior to any on-site visit allowing State Administrators more opportunities to connect to eligible entities. It is also important that State Administrators allow ample opportunity for eligible entities' staff and board members to ask questions. States can also hold a general meeting to "get to know" eligible entities; this can be done with either the Executive Director and/or upper management.

Challenges:
Having the staff capacity needed to effectively build trusting, transparent, collaborative partnerships with eligible entities is one challenge that States may face. States who intentionally set aside time to build relationships, maintained two-way, transparency, and worked with their State Association were able to alleviate this challenge. Adverse history with the Network and the State may also interfere with the State's ability to build a healthy working relationship. States who intentionally developed relationships with the Network, including the State Associations, helped them overcome this challenge.

Benefits:
Building trusting, transparent, collaborative partnerships and providing feedback that will support and help improve service delivery of eligible entities as well as the quality of services provided. As a result, more people with low incomes have the opportunity to become self-sufficient. This type

of relationship helps to provide a safe space for eligible entities to reach out to States with questions and/or concerns before it becomes a problem that may result in a finding. When the States choose to engage in this type of partnership with eligible entities, utilizing monitoring as an opportunity to provide T/TA and share promising practices, it will likely result in fewer findings or concerns at the local level. In turn, the State will likely have fewer findings or concerns from the Office of Community Services (OCS). Overall, monitoring for impact versus just compliance will help State Administrators do their job more effectively and efficiently.

Tools/Templates/Resources:

- [See the State Management Work Group Page](#)

2. *Preparation is Key* – The State takes the needed steps to prepare itself and eligible entities in advance of monitoring

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Arizona, Colorado, Maine, Montana, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Utah, Virginia, Wisconsin

Purpose:

Preparation is not only necessary, but it is key to ensure that the monitoring process is consistent, adheres to the plan, and is useful for eligible entities. The ACSI high-scoring states interviewed all made preparation a key component when preparing for monitoring in every aspect for not just them, but for the eligible entities as well. By preparing, agencies are provided the opportunity to obtain the best possible outcomes and reduce the perception that monitoring is a "gotcha" exercise. State offices also can underscore the development of a trusting partnership by ensuring transparency in the monitoring process.

Method:

The state should develop and/or update its risk assessment tool prior to beginning a new monitoring cycle. Once the tool is finalized, a risk assessment of all eligible entities is needed to determine the number and type of monitoring that is to take place. After the risk assessment has been completed and the monitoring schedule developed, State Administrators should share the results and monitoring schedule with eligible entities. Some State offices allow eligible entities to help develop the monitoring schedule. This helps reduce some of the administrative burdens on eligible entities and provides them with the opportunity to feel included, helping to build a good working relationship with the State. The state should provide notice in advance of the onsite visit, typically 1 to 3 months; this includes sharing the state's monitoring tools. States should hold Network-wide training and/or one-on-one pre-meetings to highlight the goals and expectations of the monitoring process and provide ample time for eligible entities to ask questions prior to an onsite visit. This allows eligible entities to understand the process and helps to reduce anxiety. It is vital that State Administrators communicate early and often with eligible entities. This helps to build trusting, transparent, collaborative partnerships between the State and eligible entities. Conducting a desk review in advance of the onsite monitoring leads the way to building healthy working relationships by creating more face-to-face time between the State and eligible entities during the time of the visit. This intentional time together allows both the State Administrators and the eligible agencies to become familiar with the practices and policies at both offices.

Challenges:

Staff capacity was the greatest challenge when implementing this promising practice. In some cases, the arrival of new State Administrators who may not be familiar with CSBG or the state's monitoring process may need more time or training to prepare for the monitoring visit. It is important that the state ensures that there is ample time for training, notification, and the actual monitoring visit.

Benefits:

States found allowing ample time for themselves and eligible entities to prepare for an onsite monitoring visit, alleviated stress as well as provided a more relaxed and productive visit. Eligible entities have a better understanding of what is monitoring, its purpose, and its objectives, so they are ready for a monitoring visit which can result in fewer findings and/or concerns. Overall, this kind of transparency at the State level will help to build a more trusting relationship with eligible entities.

Tools/Templates/Resources:

- [See the State Management Work Group Page](#)

3. *Consistency is Critical* – Establishing processes, procedures, and trainings at the State level that help to ensure that monitoring of *all* eligible entities is completed in a uniform manner

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Arizona, Colorado, Maine, Montana, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Utah, Virginia, Wisconsin

Purpose:

ACSI top-scoring states indicated they all try to ensure the monitoring process is consistent for all eligible entities. This means that all State staff are trained in accordance with established processes and procedures.

Method:

In order to establish and maintain consistency, State leadership must create and maintain a culture of "we are all in this together" and that monitoring is not a "gotcha" exercise. Ideally, the State should develop and maintain a standardized monitoring manual that includes the expectations of eligible entities and all related tools. This includes establishing state monitoring standards such as mutual respect, joint problem-solving, and open communication. These monitoring tools should be treated as a "living" document and should be continuously assessed and updated once the full monitoring cycle of all eligible entities has been completed. All State monitoring staff should be involved in updating/modifying the monitoring tool and be regularly trained on how to use it. To maintain consistency, monitoring staff should use tools in the same manner and ask the same questions regardless of whether the eligible entity is high performing. States can use organizational standards as a basis to help create more consistent processes. Having a monitoring coordinator who is the point of contact for all eligible entities and is involved in every step of the process or having one person, such as the manager, review every monitoring report before finalizing is another way to help ensure consistency for all. States should also focus on continuous improvement, using feedback from eligible entities to improve monitoring processes and spend time training on the art of monitoring. This includes what is most important, what is a best practice issue, repeat issue, how important is the issue, etc.

Challenges:

One challenge States may face is not having a written process in place and/or insufficient training of staff. In cases such as these, State leadership needs to identify its goal when conducting monitoring and start to create the culture from the top down. Strained relationships with the eligible entities may also create a challenge in shifting to a consistent format. It is important States work towards building trusting, transparent, collaborative partnerships with eligible entities.

Benefits:

Implementing this promising practice gives eligible entities a better understanding of monitoring at the local level and helps improve service delivery for customers served by CSBG, creating ease

of access to services. Familiarity with the state office protocols minimizes eligible entities' concerns and assists in building strong working relationships, helping eligible entity staff understand expectations, timeframes, deadlines, etc. Having a clear and concise format for getting the work completed helps the State to establish consistency and provides State Administrators a framework on what and how to monitor in a coherent manner. It also helps establish institutional knowledge and can reduce the likelihood of OCS findings and/or concerns during state monitoring.

Tools/Templates/Resources:
- [See the State Management Work Group Page](#)

4. ***Post-Monitoring Efforts are Integral to the Process –*** States track individual eligible entity corrective action plans for progress, identify and share trends, issues, and promising practices seen in the monitoring and take action to address the identified trends and issues

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Arizona, Colorado, Maine, Montana, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Utah, Virginia, Wisconsin

Purpose:

ACSI top scoring States not only track an eligible entity's progress regarding corrective action, but they use any trends identified throughout the monitoring process as an opportunity to improve how CSBG is administered.

Method:

States track progress on corrective action plans regularly, this can be done by using a simple spreadsheet, word document, or a more sophisticated database. States must intentionally review all corrective action plans on a regular basis, this should be done either monthly or bi-monthly. High-scoring states also use the monitoring process to identify any trends regarding both issues and promising practices. The State then uses the items identified to develop T/TA, revise and/or develop new policies, as well as update monitoring tools based on feedback from the Network. It is important that States work alongside eligible entities to better understand their challenges and strengths to increase compliance and build relationships that produce more success in the future. This helps ensure that monitoring is not only useful for eligible entities but more importantly, helps eligible entities effectively and efficiently administer CSBG within their communities.

Challenges:

Some states reported staff capacity needed to conduct follow-ups in a timely manner was one challenge. However, working to develop and/or maintain strong relationships with eligible entities can ensure these efforts are being completed and done well. Maintaining a transparent, two-way relationship with eligible entities can help with this process. It is important that State Administrators establish a tracking method that works best for them and helps to create consistent follow-ups on corrective action items.

Benefits:

Eligible entities have a robust and healthy agency that can focus on services as a result of the support from the State Office, which is available in times of need. Post-monitoring efforts can help State Administrators build stronger relationships with eligible entities, as well as ensure States are meeting their purpose as monitors and going beyond checking a box. It also provides State Administrators with an opportunity to better understand eligible entities, allowing them to dive deeper into areas of non-compliance.

Tools/Templates/Resources:

- [See the State Management Work Group Page](#)

Planning: State Plan

What is the State Plan?
The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) State Plan is the application process that State Lead Agencies use to apply for CSBG federal funding from the Office of Community Services (OCS). The State Plan is used for planning purposes including but not limited to statewide goals, public hearing requirements, use of funds, training and technical assistance, state linkages, and communication.

Promising Practices

1. ***Start Early*: Timeline Mapping** – Develop a timeline, customized by the state, which outlines all the steps including completion dates needed to develop the State Plan

2. ***Educate the Network:* State Plan Training** – Provide various training opportunities for the Network that highlights what a State Plan is, why it is important, what is needed from the Eligible entities, the timeline for developing the plan, and open communication

3. ***Gather Input First*: Prior to Drafting the State Plan** – Provide numerous opportunities for the Network to engage in conversations about the development of the State Plan instead of drafting a plan and only then sending it out for comment

4. ***Close the Loop*: Follow-up on All Comments** - Ensure that all comments are either incorporated or addressed as to why they were not, each state tracks the comments and source of the comments throughout the entire process

5. ***Modified Public Hearing*** – Offer extended comment periods, hybrid model (in-person/virtual), combine CSBG and LIHEAP state plan processes

6. ***Complete a Two-Year State Plan*** – Either a one-year or two-year State Plan is required; utilizing a two-year State Plan reduces workload and allows State Administrators the opportunity to focus on other prominent issues for the Network

1. ***Start Early: Timeline Mapping*** – Develop a timeline, customized by the state, which outlines all the steps including completion dates needed to develop the State Plan

States Who Have Employed This Practice:
Maryland, Nebraska, North Dakota, Virginia, Utah

Purpose:
ACSI top-scoring states indicated they all started the state plan application process early in the fiscal year, engaged in conversations about the purpose of the State Plan, and hold planned listening sessions for feedback. Developing an individualized timeline of these important tasks can help State Administrators execute the planning process in such a way that will reduce workload burden, offer better Network engagement, and in turn increase ACSI scores.

Method:
Establishing and maintaining a strong, collaborative relationship with the State Association and the Network is key in state planning. How State Administrators involve Eligible entities vary but the common thread is meeting with their Network early and frequently with in-person or one-on-one meetings to increase understanding of the State Plan with open feedback opportunities.

States must develop an outline specific to their needs, which includes state regulations related to CSBG, public hearings, and/or nonprofits, for example:
- Submission deadline
- Review of IMs/statutes for any relevant updates/requirements
- Ensure or establish user accounts in OLDC
- Obtain an updated Designation Letter (if applicable) - this can take longer in some states
- Collect ACSI survey information
- Collect monitoring information
- Collect Tripartite Board information
- Collect Organizational Standard information
- Update Use of funds (if applicable)
- Send out requests for:
  - Possible information needed from State Association/Network for linkages/partnerships
  - Fiscal Data – if not in your department
  - Public hearing requirements (when to send out notices to the public, securing room/zoom, receive and implement comments and changes)

Challenges:
Potential challenges State Administrators may face include understanding state regulations related to CSBG, public hearings, and/or nonprofits. State Administrators should work with upper management, their legal department to help, and/or National Partnership if they have questions in these areas.

Benefits:

Developing a timeline and sharing the information with the Network creates the opportunity for greater communication and builds relationships, creating a stronger Network. It helps to provide eligible entities with a better understanding of what the State Plan is and the process it takes to plan for it. Additionally, it allows for clarity of expectations and staying on track at the State level.

Tools/Templates/Resources:

- See the State Management Work Group Page

2. *Educate the Network: State Plan Training* – Provide various training opportunities for the Network that highlights what a State Plan is, why it is important, what is needed from the Eligible entities, the timeline for developing the plan, and open communication

States Who Have Employed This Practice:
Maryland, North Dakota, Ohio, Virginia

Purpose:
States who offer multiple training opportunities on the State Plan typically received higher ACSI scores. Some States host webinar series for eligible entities that explains "What is a State Plan and why it matters." Others utilize their State Association's annual conference to host an individual session to review and receive comments and feedback.

Method:
Develop a PowerPoint presentation covering the major sections of the State Plan. A good working relationship with OCS and NASCSP can help with the development of trainings. These trainings can be done either in person or virtually in fall or winter, depending on a State's individual timeline. The State Association's annual conference can also be used to host State Plan training. Eligible entities are invited to allow new staff an opportunity to learn about the State Plan/process and a refresher for senior staff.

Challenges:
States wanting to employ this going forward may have difficulty with encouraging attendance and/or lack of engagement among eligible entities. Developing clear, constant, and consistent communication highlighting the value of these trainings may encourage Network engagement.

Benefits:
States found that offering trainings on the State Plan to eligible entities provide agency staff with a basic knowledge of the importance and function of the State Plan, as well as helps to eliminate confusion. It allows eligible entities an opportunity to understand the State's expectations, where agency contribution is needed, and a chance to gain input prior to the draft being developed. It helps State Administrators build better relationships with eligible entities and gain greater insight into agency individual needs. It may also allow States to start the planning process early.

Tools/Templates/Resources:
- [See the State Management Work Group Page](#)

3. ***Gather Input First: Prior to Drafting the State Plan*** – Provide numerous opportunities for the Network to engage in conversations about the development of the State Plan instead of drafting a plan and only then sending it out for comment

States Who Have Employed This Practice:
Maryland, Massachusetts, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Utah, Virginia, Wisconsin

Purpose:
Gathering feedback on the State Plan is a requirement of CSBG. Getting input from eligible entities and the public helps the State develop an effective State Plan that works towards addressing the causes and conditions within the community.

Method:
When drafting a State Plan, it is important for States to incorporate gathering input into the timeline at the beginning and communicate the timeline to eligible entities It is also a good practice to share the expectations of gathering feedback and by when, to eligible entities. Creating formal communication opportunities such as roundtable meetings, regional listening sessions, one-on-one calls, and/or forming a workgroup can be effective. It is important to consistently gather input from eligible entities prior to drafting each State Plan, this could be annually or biennially, depending on the type of plan. Tracking comments throughout the fiscal year is also helpful.

Challenges:
When developing the timeline, State Administrators may face potential challenges in understanding state regulations related to CSBG, public hearings, and/or nonprofits. Having a strong understanding of these elements will help States incorporate gathering input into the timeline at the beginning. It is important that States are strategic and organized when getting requests for feedback out ahead of time.

Benefits:
Offering multiple opportunities for feedback to eligible entities helps the State meet the requirement of gathering feedback. In turn, eligible entities are more likely to engage and feel listened to, giving way to a good working relationship. It also allows eligible entities more time to consider what input they may have, which leads to a greater probability that their input can be included in a meaningful way. For States, it allows them to know ahead of time what the possible areas of contention are, allowing states to be proactive in troubleshooting and coming to a compromise that works for all stakeholders.

Tools/Templates/Resources:
- [See the State Management Work Group Page](#)

4. *Close the Loop: Follow-up on All Comments* - Ensure that all comments are either incorporated or addressed as to why they were not, each state tracks the comments and source of the comments throughout the entire process.

States Who Have Employed This Practice:
Maryland, Ohio, Utah, Virginia, Wisconsin

Purpose:
States scoring high on the State Plan section of the ACSI survey had the common practice of addressing all comments prior to the draft of the State Plan and indicating why or why not the feedback was incorporated into the final iteration.

Method:
States must be intentional in creating opportunities for the Network to engage in conversations about the development of the State Plan and track comments during these interactions. Additionally, some States track questions they receive throughout the year so they can be addressed during the state planning process. This inventory of comments is used as a checklist for review/discussion during any meetings with the eligible entities, internal State Office meetings/draft preparations, and/or presentations with the State Association. The comments are tracked through the end of the public comment period and the final status of each comment is communicated to the entire network, along with a copy of the final plan.

Challenges:
Typically, eligible entities had difficulty understanding why their feedback was not incorporated. Leadership at the State Office sometimes struggled with not understanding the context of the comments. States who maintained transparent communication and provided a contextual background that included sound reasoning regarding comments that were not adopted were able to address some of these challenges.

Benefits:
Transparency in what changes were taken into consideration in the drafting process can help inform future feedback and help build trust with the State Office and eligible entities. It enables the State to show the purpose and reasoning behind the various sections of the State Plan and for compliance with State Accountability Measures. A sound tracking system allows State Administrators to easily store and find comments, without relying on memory or concerns about staff turnover.

Tools/Templates/Resources:
- See the State Management Work Group Page

5. *Modified Public Hearing* – Offer extended comment periods, hybrid model (in-person/virtual), combine CSBG and LIHEAP State Plan processes

States Who Have Employed This Practice:
Massachusetts, North Dakota, Ohio, Utah

Purpose:
Offering a modified public hearing can improve efficiency and engagement between the eligible entities and the public. It can also increase attendance for the State Plan public hearing.

Method:
Building an extended comment period, one month prior to a public hearing and one month after a public hearing, into the timeline helps to ensure ample time for feedback and comments. Additionally, offering a hybrid public hearing option where attendees can participate both in-person and virtually was found to be beneficial in increasing engagement. For State Lead Offices that administer both CSBG and LIHEAP, coordinating eligible entity listening sessions and public hearings on the same day/time has also been shown to improve efficiency and engagement, as many CSBG eligible entities also provide LIHEAP services.

For all practices identified, the major step was the notification of the public hearing, which would include information on the timeframes for public comment, the focus of the public hearing (i.e., CSBG and LIHEAP focus), and methods for attending the public hearing (in-person, virtual, hybrid).

Challenges:
When developing the timeline, State Administrators may face potential challenges in terms of understanding state regulations related to CSBG, public hearings, and/or nonprofits. Some States may not be able to accommodate both a hybrid (in-person and virtual) hearing. In terms of coordinating a public hearing for both CSBG and LIHEAP, not having a good working relationship with the LIHEAP state contact may create some difficulties. It also may take some strategic planning and time to coordinate a shared public hearing with the LIHEAP state contact.

Benefits:
Each of these practices increases the opportunity for public engagement regarding the administration of the CSBG program, which may result in increased program effectiveness. It also promotes improved participation in the public hearing process.

Tools/Templates/Resources:
- See the State Management Work Group Page

6. ***Complete a Two-Year State Plan*** – Either a one-year or two-year State Plan is required; utilizing a two-year State Plan reduces workload and allows State Administrators the opportunity to focus on other prominent issues for the Network

States Who Have Employed This Practice:
Maryland, Massachusetts, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Utah, Virginia

Purpose:
While a one-year State Plan is an option, the ACSI high scoring states all elected to complete a two-year State Plan. The States interviewed felt a one-year plan would require the State to be in a consistent cycle of planning, without time for actual implementation, and restricts meaningful feedback since planning for a subsequent plan begins almost immediately after a plan is filed/starts.

Method:
If a State is currently not using a two-year State Plan and has been approved to switch, it is important they develop a communication plan for its Network. This can be done by hosting roundtable meetings, regional listening sessions, and/or one-on-one calls with eligible entities. States can also include flexible language in their plan to allow for a quick response to crises such as "other Network identified priorities, including . . ." in section 7.9h.

Once the change is communicated to the Network, States should use the promising practice of timeline mapping to effectively develop a two-year State Plan. OCS supplies a two-year State Plan template which is then filed in OLDC.

Challenges:
Some State offices may be hesitant to switch to a two-year plan. Explaining that conducting a two-year plan is allowable per the CSBG Act and its benefits may effectively address this challenge. Not effectively communicating the switch from a one-year to a two-year State Plan to eligible entities may also create some concerns in the Network. It is important that States clearly and consistently communicate that change. Sharing the reasoning behind the change and its benefits will be helpful to the Network.

Benefits:
Utilizing a two-year State Plan reduces workload and allows State Administrators the opportunity to focus on other prominent issues for the Network. It helps to reduce burnout among State CSBG staff caused by constant requests for feedback, meetings, draft reviews, etc. Additionally, it allows the State to develop longer-term goals and strategic planning, creating more time to achieve meaningful progress.

Tools/Templates/Resources
- [See the State Management Work Group Page](#)

Policy Development: Development and Dissemination of Clear Policies

What is the purpose of Policies and Procedures?
The CSBG Act mandates certain aspects of how state CSBG offices will operate but leaves significant authority and flexibility in the hands of the States. Policies are the rules or guidelines governing State CSBG operations while procedures determine the specific means to implement the policies. Policies provide the State with a method to ensure compliance, set standards that demand high quality, minimize risk, and define operations. Policies and procedures are a living document that changes as new information and issues are identified and practices are adjusted.

Promising Practices:

1. *Consistent, timely review of policies, ahead of OCS review* – Intentional regular review of the State's policies and procedures to ensure that CSBG Act mandates, OCS guidance, and/or any State laws and regulations that impact the administration of CSBG funding are accurate and up to date

2. *Engage the Network and Stakeholders throughout the process* – Identify and engage all relevant stakeholders (i.e., legal counsel, other state departments, State Associations, eligible entities, etc.) in multiple ways throughout the update process to ensure buy-in at all levels

3. *Minimize administrative burden* – The elimination of policies that create administratively burdensome program requirements for both eligible entities and States and are not a requirement of the CSBG Act, OCS Guidance, and/or State laws or regulations

1. ***Consistent, timely review of policies, ahead of OCS review*** – Intentional regular review of the State's policies and procedures to ensure that CSBG Act mandates, OCS guidance, and/or any State laws and regulations that impact the administration of CSBG funding are accurate and up to date

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Arizona, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Ohio, Washington, Utah

Purpose:

Consistent, timely review of policies and procedures helps to ensure that States are following the CSBG Act mandates, incorporating guidance provided by the Office of Community Services (OCS), and that any State laws and regulations that affect the administration of CSBG are included. It is especially helpful to conduct a review of your state's policies and procedures ahead of an OCS review. This allows the State to determine if the policies and procedures are up-to-date, and accurate, as well as can help reduce the risk of an OCS finding or concern.

Method:

States should develop a feasible timeline based on States' tasks and/or OCS to review policies and procedures, at minimum States should review/update their manual annually or biannually. It is important to identify all relevant stakeholders to include (i.e., legal counsel, other state departments, State Associations, eligible entities, etc.), and gather all federal and state regulations that impact policies. States should engage their Network and gather feedback throughout the development process while being mindful of the impact policy changes may have on service implementation at the local level. To do this, States can form a workgroup, have regular meetings with the Network, and/or share policy drafts to gather feedback. Involving the State Association can help with Network engagement. The average length of time to review and update policies is approximately three to four months, depending on the policy and update type (complete overhaul vs. one policy change).

Challenges:

Having the staff capacity needed for a full policy and procedures update was identified as the greatest challenge. State Administrators will need to be intentional to set aside time for policy review, updates, and engagement of all relevant stakeholders. Scheduling consistent, regular meetings both internally and with all relevant stakeholders can help to reduce this burden.

Benefits:

States found that consistent, timely reviews of policies helped to provide eligible entities needed guidance that clearly defines program requirements, ideally allowing clients to easily access services in a timely manner. It helps to establish the State's expectations of eligible entities to effectively administer CSBG funding and defines what States will monitor. Updated policies support new staff training efforts at both the State and local levels as well as help to institute

historical knowledge for the Network. Reviews and/or updates ahead of an OCS review reduce the likelihood of concerns and/or findings by ensuring that States are following their own policies and procedures when administering and monitoring eligible entities.

Tools/Templates/Resources:

- See the State Management Work Group Page

2. ***Engage the Network and Stakeholders throughout the process*** – Identify and engage all relevant stakeholders (i.e., legal counsel, other state departments, State Associations, eligible entities, etc.) in multiple ways throughout the update process to ensure buy-in at all levels

States Who Have Employed This Practice:
Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Utah, Vermont, Wisconsin

Purpose:
ACSI top-scoring states indicated they engage all relevant stakeholders before, during, and upon completion of policies and procedures updates. This type of engagement helps to clear, constant, and consistent communication as well as gather valuable feedback that affects the administration of CSBG funding at both the State and local levels. Ensuring all relevant stakeholder needs are understood and incorporated at the beginning of the project helps minimize rework and ensure concerns are addressed early on. Ensuring stakeholder engagement fosters strong, collaborative relationships at all levels.

Method:
It is important to identify all relevant stakeholders who may have an impact on any policy changes such as the state's legal department, fiscal department, State Association, eligible entities, etc. State Administrators should know who in their office needs to be made aware of changes, and what the internal approval process entails. Engaging the network before, during, and after policy updates can be facilitated by tools like virtual and in-person meetings, surveys, requests for feedback, and/or email. Planning ahead for milestones that warrant communication can help streamline the process. The gathering, aggregation, analysis, incorporation, and communication of the impact of feedback ensures stakeholder engagement and buy-in. This can help to reduce pushback from the Network on policy changes as they typically have a better understanding of any revisions and feel included in the process.

Challenges:
Some states reported that this process can be lengthy and time intensive such as managing meetings and communications. Additionally, internal stakeholders like lawyers can delay the process significantly. To reduce this, States should establish and regularly adjust realistic and comprehensive timelines to help internal project management as well as ensure accurate expectations among stakeholders. States should share any changes in the timeline with stakeholders. Also, State Administrators should anticipate potential concerns and pushback regarding changes and listen thoroughly, closing the communication loop on issues whenever possible. Engaging the Network throughout the development process and explaining why something cannot be removed (i.e., CSBG Act requirement) may reduce pushback.

Benefits:

The Network has the most comprehensive understanding of client needs, so their feedback helps ensure the program works well for the clients served. When the Network is able to provide feedback on proposed changes, it can be an opportunity to streamline program management and affirm that policies align with programmatic capacity. This stakeholder engagement throughout the process helps eligible entities understand the metrics on which they will be monitored. Gathering feedback from all relevant stakeholders throughout the process minimizes the need to rework any updates because something was left out or not accurate. It also allows the State to address any concerns and reduces pushback during the implementation process. Including agencies in the review and/or development of policies helps to build strong, collaborative relationships between the CSBG State Lead Office and the eligible entities.

Tools/Templates/Resources:

- See the State Management Work Group Page

3. *Minimize administrative burden* – The elimination of policies that create administratively burdensome program requirements for both eligible entities and States and are not a requirement of the CSBG Act, OCS Guidance, and/or State laws or regulations

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Minnesota, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Ohio, Washington, Arizona, Utah, Vermont

Purpose:

States who scored well on the ACSI found that reducing the administrative burden was a key component in the development and dissemination of their policies and procedures. In doing so, it not only provides eligible entities with the capacity to effectively deliver services but also reduces the number of policies that States are required to monitor, thereby increasing capacity at both the State and local levels.

Method:

When reviewing policies and procedures States should look to remove anything repetitive or that does not have a sound explanation for remaining. It is helpful for States to cross-reference other program policies to see where policies can be more aligned. States should gather feedback from eligible entities specifically asking them which policies are burdensome. The State should also review eligible entity questions, monitoring findings and/or concerns, etc. to determine if policy changes are needed. Routine policy review and gathering consistent eligible entity feedback will be needed to sustain this practice.

Challenges:

Due to the flexible nature of CSBG, both the CSBG Act and OCS guidance can be vague which may result in State hesitancy to change policies. States were able to navigate policy changes better when they reached out to National Partners such as CAPLAW or NASCSP and/or other States with questions. Seeking guidance from internal program staff at the CSBG State Lead Office was also helpful.

Benefits:

Eligible entities have a better understanding of the State's CSBG requirements, allowing for more time to administer services instead of contract compliance. Less burdensome policies provide the State with more flexibility to quickly adapt under special circumstances (i.e., COVID, natural disasters, etc.). It also reduces the State's monitoring requirements allowing State Administrators more time to provide program support to eligible entities.

Tools/Templates/Resources:
- [See the State Management Work Group Page](#)

Training and Technical Assistance: CNA, CAP Plans, Strategic Plans, ROMA, & Targeting

What is the purpose of Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA)?
The State Plan requires the State to identify its strategy for delivering T/TA to eligible entities. Quality T/TA can improve the overall performance of CSBG, enhance service delivery, and in turn reduce poverty in the community served. CSBG IM 49 establishes Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) as a requirement for the Network and has been identified as a major area of need for T/TA.

Promising Practices:

1. *Active Certified ROMA Professionals at all levels of the Network (State Lead, State Association)* – Having the right CSBG staff hold and maintain either a ROMA Trainer or Implementor certification, especially at the State and State Association levels

2. *Standardize CSBG Terminology* – A statewide Community Needs Assessment (CNA) manual and Community Action Plan (CAP Plan) template, with logic models, which provides a standardized format and outlines what data should be included

3. *Implement a Statewide Database* – The identification, development, and/or implementation of a statewide database in that eligible entities input CSBG data related to client demographics, services, outcomes, funding usage, and/or organizational standards

4. *Utilize Contractors for Training* – The use of outside vendors such as the State Association, National Partners, and/or other merchants for Network T/TA needs

5. *Communicate and Share* – Intentional, regular communication, and sharing of T/TA-related information that is clear, constant, and consistent

1. *Active Certified ROMA Professionals at all levels of the Network (State Lead, State Association)* – Having the right CSBG staff hold and maintain either a ROMA Trainer or Implementor certification, especially at the State and State Association levels

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Arkansas, Illinois, Maryland, Ohio, Texas, Washington

Purpose:

CSBG IM 49 establishes ROMA as a requirement for the Network. Increasing the importance of ROMA and modeling this importance at the State and State Association level bring consistency to the entire CSBG network. This best practice helps to elevate and support eligible entities in the ROMA practices and principles for the CNA, CAP Plans, strategic plans, targeting, and reporting. When the State and/or the State Association has this certification, they are able to support the Network in meeting the ROMA performance measures. Having certified ROMA professionals at the local level helps to ensure the quality of ROMA practices and principles. It is crucial to have the right individuals trained who will have the greatest impact on implementing ROMA within their office.

Method:

A commitment from the CSBG State Lead Office, the State Association, and eligible entities to complete the ROMA Trainer and/or Implementer certification. States who openly support and/or provide discretionary funding for ROMA certifications at eligible entities have found a greater number of certified professionals at the local level. There is a time and financial commitment to becoming ROMA certified. It is approximately a six-month time commitment to become certified, with a yearly recertification process. Currently, there is no state-specific training program and State Administrators will need to use eligible entities' data to complete their certification and yearly recertification.

Challenges:

Staff capacity at all levels (State, State Association, and eligible entities) was found to be the greatest challenge. There is also a financial cost to become certified which may be burdensome to meet. States that provide discretionary funding to eligible entities specifically supporting ROMA certifications are able to reduce this burden.

Benefits:

The benefits of ROMA-certified professionals at the State, State Association, and eligible entities help to improve programs and services. States found there was an improvement in the quality of data collection and annual reports. States and/or State Associations also have a better understanding of why ROMA is so important and how to deliver quality ROMA trainings for their Network. Both States and State Associations were able to provide clear, constant,

and consistent communication regarding the ROMA principles and practices. Overall, this will provide the Network with a better way to tell the Community Action Agency story.

Tools/Templates/Resources:
- See the State Management Work Group Page

2. *Standardize CSBG Terminology* – A statewide Community Needs Assessment (CNA) manual and Community Action Plan (CAP Plan) template, with logic models, which provides a standardized format and outlines what data should be included

States Who Have Employed This Practice:
Idaho, Maine, Maryland, Oklahoma, Oregon, Utah

Purpose:
This best practice in standardizing CSBG terminology with CNA manuals and CAP Plan templates helps to provide clear guidance on the requirements of the CSBG Act and the expectations at the State level. It offers eligible entities insight as to why these items are needed and how this information is used. This clear and concise approach will further support the CSBG Network by providing a tool that can be utilized for T/TA. It also helps to institute historical knowledge for the Network at both the State and local levels.

Method:
The initial startup of preparing and distributing the manuals/templates will depend on the State Administrators' capacity level. States will need to identify all CSBG Act requirements and OCS guidance that impacts CNA and CAP Plans. It is important to review the ROMA practices and principles when developing these manuals/templates. State Administrators should also work with upper management, if needed, to identify the expectations of eligible entities in these areas. States will need to regularly review manuals/templates and make updates as needed.

Challenges:
Staff capacity was found to be the greatest challenge for the development of CNA manuals and CAP Plan templates. Whenever possible, States should utilize tools already created by ACSI top scorers and make individual State updates as needed. Differing language at the federal, state, and local levels may be difficult to navigate. States who created a "crosswalk" identifying language with shared meanings helped both the State and eligible entities. States found that building in consistencies whenever possible and writing out the clarifications helped to eliminate confusion for eligible entities.

Benefits:
This promising practice helps everyone in the Network use the same language, creating consistency and continuity. Developing a CNA manual and CAP Plan template clearly defines the States expectations. It can also increase staff capacity at the local level as eligible entities are not creating a new format and/or know what data points are needed and where to look. Having a standard format provides State Administrators with a better understanding of poverty at both a State and local level, allowing the State to easily identify any common trends.

Tools/Templates/Resources:

- See the State Management Work Group Page

3. *Implement a Statewide Database* – The identification, development, and/or implementation of a statewide database in that eligible entities input CSBG data related to client demographics, services, outcomes, funding usage, and/or organizational standards

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Maine, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, West Virginia

Purpose:

Performance management is a requirement of CSBG. The development and/or implementation of a statewide database for annual reporting and/or organizational standards helps to ensure that States and eligible entities are meeting these requirements in a consistent and timely manner, often reducing duplication.

Method:

States need to determine the value of utilizing a statewide database for organizational standards and/or annual reports. State Administrators need to engage their State Association and eligible entities to gather feedback and determine needs. States can hold workgroups, listening sessions, open office hours, and/or regularly scheduled meetings with the Network to gather input. Many eligible entities get multiple funding sources, States should aim to reduce duplicative data collection and/or entry if possible. States should decide if they wish to develop a database or purchase current software. Developing a database will require more time and dedication. Predeveloped software may also need customization, which could take time. States will need to follow their procurement policy when seeking a vendor.

Challenges:

The development and/or implementation of a statewide database can be time-consuming. States may get resistance when implementing a statewide database. It is crucial that States engage their Network throughout the process to lessen any pushback and reduce duplicative work for eligible entities.

Benefits:

The development and/or implementation of a statewide database helps to ensure that reporting requirements are being met in a consistent manner by all eligible entities. It allows the States access to "real-time" data and helps the State identify trends, allowing the State quickly to recognize any T/TA needs. A statewide database provides a tool that can be utilized to train new staff at both the State and local levels. When using a statewide database, all reporting updates are consistent for the Network and can capture other funding sources allowing for easier reporting.

Tools/Templates/Resources:
- See the State Management Work Group Page

4. *Utilize Contractors for Training* – The use of outside vendors such as the State Association, National Partners, and/or other merchants for Network T/TA needs

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Arkansas, Maryland, Maine, Ohio, Utah, Oregon

Purpose:

The State Plan requires the State to identify its strategy for delivering training and technical assistance to eligible entities. Depending on staff capacity and expertise, utilizing contractors for T/TA can improve the quantity and quality of T/TA provided to the Network.

Method:

States should gather feedback from eligible entities, review monitoring findings, and organizational standards to figure out T/TA needs. States will need to identify what T/TA can be provided in-house with the allowed staff capacity and expertise. Ideally, States should work with their State Associations to determine the Network T/TA needs and if the State Association can assistance with training topics. If neither the State nor State Association has the capacity and/or knowledge, States will need to identify a potential contractor to deliver the T/TA and follow their procurement policy.

Challenges:

State Administrators may still face some capacity issues in determining T/TA needs, identifying contractors, the procurement process, and/or initial planning meetings with the selected vendor. However, this is still minimal in comparison to providing the T/TA in-house. States should also identify a way to measure the effectiveness of any training provided to the Network.

Benefits:

Utilizing contractors can increase State Administrators' capacity, this is especially true for CSBG State Lead Offices with one staff. Most CSBG T/TA providers have materials that have already been created and may only need to be updated to meet any State specific needs, allowing for quicker delivery of trainings. Contracting with your State Association can help to foster a strong, collaborative relationship. Quality T/TA can improve the overall performance of CSBG, improve service delivery, and in turn reduce poverty in the community served.

Tools/Templates/Resources:

- [See the State Management Work Group Page](#)

5. *Communicate and Share* – Intentional, regular communication, and sharing of T/TA-related information that is clear, constant, and consistent

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Arkansas, California, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, Utah

Purpose:

Open communication and sharing at the State level help to identify T/TA needs. It also helps to ensure that eligible entities are aware of T/TA opportunities and increase participation.

Method:

States who engage eligible entities in multiple ways such as newsletters, one-on-one meetings, open office hours, and/or anonymous emails see the greatest benefit. These intentional touchpoints allow the State to build strong, collaborative relationships with their eligible entities, in turn allowing the agencies to feel more comfortable asking T/TA-related questions. It is important for States wanting to employ this practice to maintain clear, constant, and consistent communication and sharing with their Network.

Challenges:

Identifying and committing State staff time to consistently maintain Network engagement is a significant challenge. States should determine what will work best for their Network and what State staff can realistically commit to doing. Involving the State Association may also help increase State staff capacity. Geographic areas can be a challenge (rural vs. urban). States may reduce this burden by breaking eligible entities into regions and/or bringing similar agencies together for T/TA and/or to gather input. States found that not all eligible entities fully engage in these touchpoints. This can be counteracted by having one-on-one meetings with agencies and/or developing an anonymous email system.

Benefits:

States found that open communication and sharing with the Network help to build strong, collaborative relationships with their Network. Eligible entities had greater access to State staff to ask T/TA-related questions and were more comfortable doing so. Eligible entities often felt heard and were more likely to participate in discussions that impact the Network beyond just T/TA.

Tools/Templates/Resources:
- See the State Management Work Group Page

Developing Linkages

What are Linkages?

The State Plan requires the State to develop Linkages and Coordination at the State Level. The purpose of this is to create and maintain Linkages that will increase access to CSBG services for individuals and families with low income and avoid duplication of services. The following CSBG Act and the State Accountability Measures require states to establish Linkages:

- CSBG Act, Section 676(b)(5)
- State Performance Measure 7Sa

Definition of Linkages

State CSBG Offices connect, collaborate, and communicate with other State departments and external organizations to better leverage resources, enhance information-sharing, and jump-start joint planning between those entities and the local CSBG agencies resulting in a strengthened State Network better positioned to reduce poverty in the state.

Promising Practices: These promising practices are part of an ongoing cycle, requiring all to be implemented to effectively and efficiently create long-lasting Linkages that add value for all.

1. *Engage and do the homework* – Engage with the Network to determine needs and research other possible Linkages that will add value

2. *Learn and teach* – Learn from the Network about the Linkages' needs and teach eligible entities, other State departments, potential Linkage partners, etc. about the CSBG network: its strengths, reach, capacity, knowledge, etc.

3. *Grow relationships* – Being *purposeful and intentional* in developing relationships with the Network and other key stakeholders, maintaining a two-way, transparent relationship

4. *Communicate to connect* – Sharing the State's efforts around Linkages from the start with all key stakeholders, maintaining open, transparent communication that is clear, constant, and consistent

1. *Engage and do the homework* – Engage with the Network to determine needs and research other possible Linkages that will add value

States Who Have Employed This Practice:
Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, South Carolina, Utah, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin

Purpose:
ACSI top-scoring states indicated they all engage with the Network to determine what Linkages will be of the most value. The States research current Linkages at both the State and local levels to identify existing partnerships on which they can build upon and/or identify potential gaps in Linkages.

Method:
The State should define what Linkages mean at the State level and what success looks like, setting a mission and vision. Linkages should be viewed as a strategic, mandatory function, and States should be willing to pivot, as necessary. It is critical for States to communicate early and often with State leadership about the important work of CSBG and the value Linkages add. It is essential for states to assess office capacity and maintain flexibility. State Administrators must be willing to commit to spending time now to develop relationships, understanding it will expend less effort in the future. Research will be needed to determine current Linkages or identify potential gaps. States can review contracts, Annual Report data, and/or conduct a Google search of similar types of funding and projects at the Federal, State, and local levels.

Challenges:
Capacity was found to be a significant challenge. States who have a specific position and/or include the role of developing and maintaining Linkages into one position were able to reduce the burden at the State level. Bureaucracy within the State Administration was another challenge that States faced. States who have a strong, collaborative relationship with the State Association were able to alleviate this by utilizing the relationship to help build Linkages.

Benefits:
Although building and maintaining strong, collaborative Linkages takes time in the beginning, State Administrators found it was time well spent in the long run, helping to build capacity and reduce administrative burden. Linkages that add value to the Network also benefit eligible entities and customers by increasing service delivery.

Tools/Templates/Resources:
- [See the State Management Work Group Page](#)

2. ***Learn and teach*** – Learn from the Network about the Linkages' needs and teach eligible entities, other State departments, potential Linkage partners, etc. about the CSBG network: its strengths, reach, capacity, knowledge, etc.

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, South Carolina, Utah, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin

Purpose:

States who scored well on the ACSI all indicated they maintained an open mind, allowing them to learn from the Network what the needs were. They also taught, not only the Network the importance of Linkages, but other key stakeholders such as State Leadership and potential new Linkage partners the value add.

Method:

States must be intentional when it comes to developing and maintaining Linkages, making it a state priority. States can start this process by using the ACSI data/comments to learn what the Network needs are. It is important for the State to teach the Network about the ACSI and the State's efforts to create Linkages. It is critical that State Administrators engage their Network to determine what Linkages will add value and identify where there are gaps in services, resources, etc. This can be done by holding one-on-one meetings, regular meetings with the entire Network and State Association, workgroups in coordination with the State Association, conferences, and/or statewide training events. States can also do an annual survey of eligible entities to determine Linkage needs. States should home in on the opportunities/resources available at the State level such as LIHEAP, LIWAP, WAP, Head Start, HUD, etc. that would meet the needs identified. It is vital that the State share clear, constant, and consistent communication regarding Linkages to the Network.

Challenges:

State capacity was found to be the greatest challenge. State Administrators who utilized their State Association were able to lessen the administrative burden of this promising practice. States also found that having one specific person who is responsible for building and maintaining Linkages was helpful.

Benefits:

This promising practice helps the State to gain a better understanding of the needs around Linkages and share the benefits with the Network and other key stakeholders, giving way for State Administrators to build strong, collaborative relationships that add value for all.

Tools/Templates/Resources:

- [See the State Management Work Group Page](#)

3. *Grow relationships* – Being *purposeful and intentional* in developing relationships with the Network and other key stakeholders, maintaining a two-way, transparent relationship

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, South Carolina, Utah, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin

Purpose:

Growing a strong, collaborative relationship with the Network and other key stakeholders is a crucial role in developing and maintaining Linkages that add value. These relationships must be two-way and benefit all involved. States should be interested in the other organization, know their work, be helpful to them, and push their interests when needed.

Method:

States must be *purposeful and intentional* when developing and maintaining relationships. ACSI high-scoring States were able to do this by hosting monthly/quarterly calls with the Network, state conferences, and/or webinars with Linkage partner(s). It is important for State Administrators to roll up their sleeves to assist the Network and Linkage partners whenever needed. State Administrators should advocate for eligible entities within the State; and advocate for other State departments, when needed.

Challenges:

The capacity to grow relationships that are *purposeful and intentional* was the biggest struggle for State Administrators. States who worked with their State Association and identified natural Linkages within other State departments were able to increase capacity. Establishing reoccurring meetings with the Network and/or Linkage partner(s) was also found to be helpful.

Benefits:

Growing and maintaining a strong, collaborative relationship with not only the Network, but also the State Association and Linkage partners help to better leverage resources, enhance information-sharing, and jump-start joint planning between stakeholders. Although this promising practice takes significant time, State Administrators found these relationships were able to improve service delivery at every level of the CSBG Network, making their job easier.

Tools/Templates/Resources:
- [See the State Management Work Group Page](#)

4. *Communicate to connect* – Sharing the State's efforts around Linkages from the start with all key stakeholders, maintaining open, transparent communication that is clear, constant, and consistent

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, South Carolina, Utah, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin

Purpose:

Two-way communication is key for State Administrators when trying to grow relationships. States must be willing to not only share their work at the state level but also listen to the Network and other key stakeholders to build strong, collaborative relationships that benefit all.

Method:

States were able to implement this practice by holding regular meetings, such as roundtables, workgroups, and monthly meetings with their Network and other Linkage partners. These meetings with the Network allow the State to share its efforts to create Linkages, the value and provide an opportunity for the Network to ask questions. Including the Linkage partner allows the Network to hear directly from the source. States can also share information about Linkages by utilizing a newsletter and/or using the State Association. Some high-scoring States also have one staff member taking on the responsibility of identifying, developing, and maintaining Linkages is key.

Challenges:

Finding the availability to hold these regular meetings while maintaining clear, constant, and consistent communication is one major challenge. Creating reoccurring meetings and working with the State Associations is one way to combat this. Having one designated State staff person who oversees Linkages was also found to be beneficial. This helps to ensure clear, constant, and consistent communication.

Benefits:

States who take the time to communicate to connect with their Network and other key stakeholders found they were able to build strong, collaborative relationships that help State Administrators effectively and efficiently do their job. This type of two-way communication can assist with problem-solving, improve service delivery and increase capacity at all levels.

Tools/Templates/Resources:

- [See the State Management Work Group Page](#)