

## State Management Work Group | State Plan Promising Practices

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### Purpose

The promising practices identified, and tools, templates, and resources shared in this document are the result of extensive research conducted over a three-year period by the State Management Work Group (SMWG). SMWG members helped identify the information shared here by analyzing the 2021 [American Customer Satisfaction Survey](#) (ACSI), conducting extensive research of high-scoring states, collecting and developing tools as well as other training and technical assistance (TTA) to help State Administrators with the implementation of these promising practices. The ultimate goal of this work is to improve service delivery to the CAAs and increase satisfaction with the state office, leading to improved ACSI scores.

### 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

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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)

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### 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

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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.

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### **Tools/Templates/Resources:**

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- 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.

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### **Tools/Templates/Resources**

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